The Nation.

JAN 3

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EDITORIAL

# REDLINING A BLACK BANK

Two dispatches from the banking crisis, a month apart: On November 9 Harlem's Freedom National Bank, the only black-owned commercial bank in New York City, was closed by federal regulators after suffering continued losses on outstanding loans. Usually the Feds place failing banks in conservatorship for up to a year prior to liquidation, during which time they encourage depositors with accounts above the $100,000 level to move their money to safer havens. In Freedom's case, such kindness was not in the cards. A group of New York businessmen even pulled together about $6 million to resuscitate the bank, but their efforts were stymied by what *Crain's New York Business* called the "intransigence" of federal regulators.

The appalling result: Dozens of charities and nonprofits that had kept their money with the bank as an expression of community solidarity were shocked to learn that millions of dollars would not be returned to them. When the news emerged that this would lead to drastic cuts in programs providing day care, foster care, housing, and aid to crime victims and the elderly, the Feds announced that large depositors would be covered at 50 cents to the dollar.

Fast-forward to December 13. The Treasury announced that it had been depositing more than $1 billion in tax receipts as well as operating cash—all uninsured—in the troubled Bank of New England in an effort to shore it up. Evidently some banks are "too big to fail" (cf. Continental Illinois) and thus deserve special treatment. Others, presumably, are too small to matter. Freedom National Bank was a mere fraction of the size of the $23 billion Bank of New England. But in the context of the capital-starved micro-economy of Harlem, Freedom also was too big to fail.

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WAR AND POWER

# OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

E.L. DOCTOROW

Dear Mr. President:

When the United Nations voted sanctions against Iraq something quite unusual took place: A world congress made a virtually unanimous moral judgment against the depredations of a rogue state and then implemented its judgment with action. In international concert, troops were sent to guard Saudi Arabia's borders, and military means of interdiction, on the sea and in the air, were established to punish Iraq by economic strangulation. And it was the United States government, your Administration, that was the creative force behind this achievement.

I wonder why you don't understand what a great thing you accomplished.

This U.N. action, the first major cooperative international action since the end of the cold war, was not a mere repetition of previous instances of voted sanctions. Old alliances were breached, old animosities discarded. History has given us a moment to recognize and exploit a characterological change in the nature of the world order. Think of this ad hoc union of nation-states coalescing in the perception of a moral outrage and then taking a powerful noninvasive action to rectify it. There is a moral end—the restitution of what was stolen, the reconstruction of what was destroyed; and there is a moral means to achieve it—the withdrawal of economic fellowship. What makes this action resound is that it comes beneficently in a time

(*Cont. on p. 6*)

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# EXCHANGE.

## NOTA BENE

*Wilton, Conn.*
I thought Micah L. Sifry's modest proposal very good indeed ["Let 'Em Vote for 'None of the Above,'" Sept. 10]. The NOTA idea is the only answer, I fear, to the studied absence of politics in our elections. It seems odd to me that "socialist" countries did not learn what bourgeois societies have known since at least the eighteenth century, namely, that the only way to maintain a one-party system is to have two parties. No one-party system can exist successfully unless there are two parties. *Angus Cameron*

## NOTA VOCE

*Tempe, Ariz.*
A NOTA vote is one of the best ideas I've heard to date. Disillusioned with politics at the age of 31 (I did not vote in the '88 presidential elections, nor have I voted since), I find NOTA invigorating. NOTA would bring back those interested in changing what has become an ever-worsening state of affairs in an America led by self-serving, uncaring aristocrats. NOTA would give me back my voice. *Steven Tomkiel*

## POSITIVE NOTA

*Huntingdon Valley, Pa.*
At my alma mater, Bryn Mawr, whose student Self Government Association is the oldest in the country, we have used a no vote for decades. Each ballot has three choices: the candidates, abstain and no. Because our constitution requires that the winner receive more than a simple majority, too many abstentions or no votes can cause the election to be rerun. I've always thought our system held lessons for the United States.
*S.C. Longstaff*

## NOTA SO-SO

*South Hadley, Mass.*
"None of the above" would be a useful reform, but there is another electoral reform that would make voting an even more effective exercise: the adoption of proportional representation (P.R.) elections. Almost every other industrial democracy, including the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, has chosen proportional representation over the single-member district elections used here. In P.R. elections, candidates do not have to get a majority of votes to win office; they are elected in proportion to the percentage of the votes that their party wins. This enables small parties, like the Greens in Germany, to win seats even though they may receive only 5 percent to 10 percent of the vote.

Adopting P.R. would break the two-party logjam and foster a true multiparty system, which would enable voters to find candidates who actually reflect their political views. Progressive Americans could vote for a candidate from the Rainbow Coalition or a Green party, and that candidate could win a seat. In Sifry's NOTA system, voters could cast a negative vote against both major-party candidates; but in a P.R. system, voters could cast a positive vote for a candidate. This is undoubtedly one reason voter turnout in P.R. countries usually approaches 80 percent or more. *Douglas J. Amy*

## NOTA CHANCE

*New City, N.Y.*
"For every human problem there is a solution that is simple, neat . . . and wrong," wrote H.L. Mencken. Sifry's *Nation* article as well as his *New York Times* Op-Ed piece on NOTA brought those words immediately to mind. NOTA is a proposal fraught with technical and constitutional problems and has only a dubious potential to do anything constructive. If NOTA won an election, there would be a new election with those candidates who lost in the first run barred from the second. Such a prohibition is questionably constitutional—both as to the right of an otherwise qualified candidate to run in spite of prior losses and the right of the voter to vote for whomever he or she pleases. Of course, the latter right could still be sought on a write-in basis, but Sifry doesn't consider that. Or would a write-in candidate be barred since his or her appearance on the ballot would be?

Since the NOTA vote presumably stems from a disappointed and angry electorate, the question arises as to how angry, how disappointed? Enough to force multiple elections? How can we assume that this angry electorate will view the second choices as any better than the first, or the third any better than the second? Would two, much less more, elections be the best use of funding? Will we raise taxes or cut programs to finance them? But the crux of the argument for or against NOTA is whether it will cause the parties to propose better candidates. I'm not sure anyone, least of all a party consensus, can even define such a candidate. Why would a good candidate want to run if NOTA offered the potential for being kiboshed, trashed or humiliated—the terms Sifry used in the *Times* to describe what NOTA could do for assorted gubernatorial candidates in the 1990 elections? *Bob Connor*

## SIFRY REPLIES

*New York City*
Now that John Sununu has announced that President Bush will continue to push for Congressional term limitations, the question of how to relate to the public clamor for electoral reform is becoming less of a whimsical exercise. I think progressives have an opportunity to respond with their own ideas for changes—including the longstanding demands for universal voter registration and public financing of elections. But besides these necessary but technical reforms, I think we need to find a way to interact with and rechannel what is still a free-floating part-real, part-media-generated phenomenon.

Douglas Amy and Bob Connor both raise valid questions about NOTA. Proportional representation would indeed open the way to a true multiparty system. But practically speaking, implementing it would require a constitutional convention, since the Constitution is quite clear about how seats in Congress are to be apportioned. And I don't see "give us proportional representation" as a rallying cry that the majority of disaffected voters like Steven Tomkiel might support.

Connor is probably right to object that prohibiting candidates defeated by NOTA from running in a special replacement election would be unconstitutional, so I would modify my proposal. Let the parties have the option to renominate proven losers. Some politicians might change their tune and be elected on the second try. Others would pass up the opportunity for further humiliation.

I doubt NOTA would force special elections *ad absurdum*, as S.C. Longstaff could probably verify. As I argued in my article, I think the primary effects of the NOTA option would be to enable voters to throw out the worst of the bums—the most bought-off, entrenched pols—and to influence the behavior of parties and candidates before each election. As for the "good" candidates that Connor worries would be intimidated from running by the NOTA vote—democratic procedures are supposed to serve the public will, not make life easier for office seekers.

Some NOTAble developments this fall: Between 10 percent and 20 percent of the voters in the six western Massachusetts towns around the five colleges wrote in NOTA for that state's gubernatorial race, according to town officials. A Gallup poll found that 52 percent of the Texas electorate would have voted for NOTA over Ann Richards and Clayton Williams, so slimy were their campaigns. The idea has been endorsed as worth trying by *The Boston Globe*, *The Manchester Union-Leader*, *The Wall Street Journal* and assorted media heavies. Is a full-fledged campaign for NOTA, coupled with demands for widespread reforms, worth pursuing in some states in 1992? We at *The Nation* think so and are bringing together activists from around the country to explore the possibility of starting such a campaign. Stay tuned. *Micah L. Sifry*

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*The Nation* welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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# EDITORIALS.

## Lower Education

President Bush had just taken the wheel of his shiny New Paradigm, the latest model of right-wing political philosophy to come off the White House assembly line, when he skidded, flip-flopped and went crashing into the closest tree. Perhaps it was the blurred-vision thing that bothers him from time to time. Maybe he was confused by the sudden appearance of mixed signals. Whatever the case, he simply couldn't handle the relatively easy matter of college scholarships for minority students, and now his sleek custom-made vehicle for the 1992 campaign is back in the shop.

White House gnomes seeking to repair the tattered Reagan Revolution created the New Paradigm out of trendy words ("empowerment," "responsibility," "choice") and hot buttons (racial quotas, Congressional paralysis, cultural permissiveness). Drawing lessons from such landmark events of the past year as the strong showing of crypto-Klansman David Duke in Louisiana's senatorial race and Jesse Helms's defeat of Harvey Gantt in North Carolina, the Paradigm people convinced Bush to veto the 1990 civil rights bill, which dealt with affirmative action, and overall to exploit white fears that blacks will be favored in employment, education and social services as the country free-falls into recession.

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Assistant Education Secretary Michael Williams, a well-placed cadre from the small but growing ranks of black Reaganites in government and academia, clearly thought he was riding the New Paradigm when he ruled that colleges could not offer scholarships specifically to a minority group. As first reported by former *Nation* intern Robin Epstein in *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, Williams's action was sparked by a gift of $100,000 apiece the organizers of the Fiesta Bowl promised to the two schools that would send football teams to Tempe, Arizona, despite the state's rejection of a weekday holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. The money is earmarked for scholarships for minority students, and presumably would help assuage any guilt associated with breaking the informal anti-Arizona boycott by the National Football League and others.

But somehow Williams's timing was off. Although the Administration easily weathered the protests lodged after its veto of the civil rights bill on October 22, this time the outcry was thunderous. Most important, it came directly from white establishment sources: the superrich foundation directors, great university presidents and conservative philanthropists at the top of George and Barbara's A-list. Minority scholarship funds, while certainly worthy, have never been thought to threaten the system of white privilege. They are removed from the area of intense competition inhabited by college admissions, state contracts and public employment.

In a sense, minority scholarships help both white liberals and conservatives reduce, if not altogether abandon, their responsibility to real educational reform and social change. The conservatives have a point when they charge that minority scholarship recipients are often poorly prepared for college and end up at the bottom of the class—or drop out. The conservatives see that as an excuse for killing the scholarships, which misses the point. A more just society would understand that affirmative action has to be taken up and down the line, from preschool to college, and in the larger community, in order to make higher education accessible to everyone and successful for those who are admitted.

Bush, as usual, got it all wrong. He was forced to have Williams rescind part of the ban on minority scholarships while holding out hope to his "white nationalist" constituency—the Helms vote—that the right-wing federal court system will someday allay their fears of an affirmative action deluge. No one is pleased, social justice has been ill served, and the New Paradigm may be destined for the junkyard.

# Baker Recused

Oil, as any schoolchild might know, is the lubricant of industry, politics, scandal. The memorandum below from James Baker—in which he recuses himself from any matter "that has direct and predictable effect upon the price of domestic oil and gas," as if such avoidance were possible for any Secretary of State—is more farcical than scandalous. Recall that in 1985 one of Baker's first actions as Treasury Secretary was the restoration of about two-thirds of the tax breaks his predecessor had planned to eliminate for oil producers. The oilmen, spared $5 billion at the very least, cried Hosanna. The next year his current boss and fellow Texas oil hand traveled to Saudi Arabia to lecture the sheiks that their overproduction was a kind of economic warfare against the producers of the American Southwest and the bankers whose loan portfolios were heavily invested in energy. At the time, Bush would have been secure in the knowledge that his own fortunes could only improve with higher oil prices, as would those of his friend Baker, whose holdings included numerous oil properties. They also included at least $250,000 in stock in Chemical Bank—a matter of some inconvenience when it was reported in early 1989, since the bank played a critical role in the Third World debt pyramid and, at Treasury, so had Baker. The newly dubbed Secretary of State then promised to sell off all his stock in publicly traded companies; these and other assets had been placed in a qualified blind trust. So it's unclear exactly what Baker still owned when he wrote this memo—or, for that matter, when he instructed April Glaspie to tell Saddam Hussein that the United States had "no opinion on . . . your border disagreement with Kuwait"; or in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, when oil stocks soared (they've since plunged), as did the profits of many of his Texas cronies; or what he owns now, as he prepares for talks with Saddam. Of course Baker—like Bush and the others by his elbow at the table of power—needn't make such petty calculations of personal gain before pursuing policy. Conspiracy, like guilt, is for amateurs.

**THE SECRETARY OF STATE**

**WASHINGTON**

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February 5, 1990

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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY
THE UNDER SECRETARIES
THE COUNSELOR
THE LEGAL ADVISER
THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS
THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS

FROM: SECRETARY BAKER

SUBJECT: RECUSAL FROM PARTICIPATION

This memorandum supersedes my previous recusal memorandum dated March 28, 1989.

This is to notify each of you that I am recusing myself from, and will decline to participate in, any particular matter in which my former law firm, Andrews & Kurth, is a formal party or in which it has a direct and predictable financial interest, such as representing a party in such a particular matter. No such matter should be presented to me for decision, approval or disapproval, recommendation, advice or other official action. All such matters should be directed to the Deputy Secretary, or his delegate, who has full authority to act without referring the matter to me.

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In addition, I will recuse myself from any particular matter in which I, my wife, or my dependent daughter has a financial interest. I have attached a list of companies and other entities in which one of us currently holds a financial interest. (This list reflects a new lease of oil and gas interests on the Frio County Ranch and the disposition, or decline in value to less than $1,000, of several interests previously contributed to my trust.) In this regard, I will continue to recuse myself from any particular matter that has direct and predictable effect upon the price of domestic oil and gas. Again, all such matters should be directed to the Deputy Secretary or his delegate.

# The Torturer

The bloody riots in Fez over the weekend of December 14-16, with an estimated death toll of at least forty, are a reminder to the outside world of the explosive potential of the Moroccan kingdom. In France, however, Morocco has been in the limelight for quite some time, thanks to a book that has been at the top of the nonfiction best-seller list for ten weeks. *Our Friend the King*, written by Gilles Perrault, is a damning indictment of Hassan II, the tyrant who has occupied the Moroccan throne for nearly thirty years.

It is the accumulation of details that makes the story so horrible—a tale of faked elections and parodies of justice, of riots drowned in blood, of torture and terror raised to a system of government. And it is told from the early days, including the murder in 1965 of Mehdi ben Barka, the famous Third World leader, to the present, when, since Nelson Mandela's release, Abraham Serfaty, a Moroccan Jew, has become Africa's longest-serving prisoner of conscience.

The horror is increased by Morocco's strange mixture of the modern and the medieval. Hassan's torturers quickly absorbed the innovations of their counterparts in Nazi Germany and Latin America, but his torturer in chief, General Oufkir, who for a time was Minister of the Interior, used a traditional sword as his tool of interrogation. As Perrault points out, trials in Morocco may follow modern procedures, but the sentence is often determined in the royal palace, and if the verdict does not satisfy the King, the accused can simply vanish. Stories of men kept for sixteen years without seeing daylight remind us of the darkest ages.

There is an apparent contradiction between the systematic nature of the terror and the King's rather erratic streak of sadism. In a country with an ever-growing gap between a corrupt privileged minority living in ostentatious luxury and the mass of the peasantry driven into the cities by poverty, terror had to be institutionalized in order to prevent any opposition from overthrowing the regime. Yet eighteen years after Oufkir betrayed Hassan (the executioner tried to turn his weapon against his master) Hassan refuses to grant freedom to the man's widow and children, who were obviously uninvolved in the plot. Clearly an obsession with sadistic revenge is at work here. The contradiction may, however, be more apparent than real. Hassan's arbitrary and erratic cruelty adds dread to the systemic repression.

The objection will be raised that all this is essentially a French *affaire*. After all, it is mainly French capital that profits from Morocco's cheap labor. French politicians and media stars predominate among Hassan's guests at the Mamounia in Marrakesh, one of the poshest hotels in the world, and at the lavish parties in his numerous palaces. The distinguished guests then plead for the King's record on human rights, presenting him as reasonable in foreign affairs (didn't he invite Shimon Peres?) and as the chief bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism (forgetting to add that he is also its chief recruiting agent).

But the whole matter is not so simple. France's "friend" is the United States' ally. Having provided his contingent to the Persian Gulf crusade, Hassan has gained the title of defender of Christendom, or rather of Western civilization. And he will be seen as a villain only if, like Saddam Hussein,

**COMING UP**

Adolph Reed Jr. on Louis Farrakhan

Hillel Schenker, "Letter From Israel"

**Note:** We'll be taking our customary one-week holiday break, after which we'll resume regular publication. Season's greetings to you and yours. And for the New Year, peace on earth.

★

## QUOTAS

*Bill Bennett is a fellow who employs*
*His mouth a lot: He mostly just makes noise.*
*Republicans were keen to use that skill*
*To guarantee the next election will*
*Be won or lost on "Quotas: Wrong or Right?"—*
*Reminding all the voters who are white*
*(In case, by chance, a few of them forgot)*
*That they don't like the voters who are not.*

*But Bennett finally said the party's chair*
*Was not for him. Although he wouldn't care*
*About the need to speak of race in code,*
*His money needs mean he must hit the road*
*And make a bundle speaking for a fee.*
*(And yet he talks incessantly for free.)*
*The G.O.P. committee isn't thrilled.*
*Its quota of one demagogue's unfilled.*

*Calvin Trillin*

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he changes sides. Perrault's book and the bloodbath in Fez are useful reminders of the cloud of hypocrisy under which we are drifting dangerously toward war.

# President

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

of crumbling international real-political structures—when new structures take their being from the course of historical events. Whatever the motives of the allies backing your initiative, and whatever the inducements given them, almost accidentally there is a new united consciousness of nations that can begin to compose the civilized future.

War is an expedient of Saddam Hussein, Mr. President, because he is of the barbarous past. You have the chance to create a future in which, on a smaller and smaller globe, technology races to rectify the damage of earlier technology, and the needs of any one state are becoming the needs of all—air to breathe, water to drink, soil and climate to grow crops, and an unalienated, literate citizenry to advance the civilizations of a democratic planet.

In this light, it becomes tragically regressive to raise troop levels and think only with a military mind. A new period in history brings with it a new sensibility, and what is acceptable in an earlier age is understood as monstrous in our own. As we approach the twenty-first century, it is radiantly apparent that there is now no person on earth who has an inherent moral authority to send other people to their deaths. It is no longer philosophically possible. A chief executive is not a chieftain. Nor can he be a zealot.

There is a rumor going about that even as you've instructed your Secretary of State to visit Baghdad, the Quartermaster Corps of the Army has ordered 80,000 body bags. It was George Washington, in his prescience, who decided that holders of your office would be addressed as *Mr. President*. It was George Washington who decided we would not have kings. You do not rule by divine right. You are not ordained. You are a Mister. Unless you claim celestial lineage, you simply cannot elevate yourself to an ethical justification of a course of military action that may result in 80,000 dead American young men and women. Or 8,000. Or 800. I have not heard you say that our basic survival and identity as a nation are at issue here. It is no longer a chief executive's license to articulate a national interest, other than our basic survival, that requires the death of 80,000 young men and women.

The last time—another age, a distant past—something like that happened is celebrated now in austere solemnity, one might even think in the spirit of penitence, by that dark granite monument that sits with the names of the Vietnam War dead not far from your office. Tell me now to what end those soldiers died. What acute national interest did their deaths serve? We have hospitals full of those permanently maimed and paralyzed from that war. What real-political analysis of former Secretary of State Kissinger, now again urging blitzkrieg as one of the wise men of television, was borne out in the subsequent history of our security and comfort as a nation? Does he now say of the domino theory that he once so shrilly in his wisdom insisted upon that 50,000 of a generation died so that he can make the rounds at black-tie dinners? It is my understanding we have been talking lately to the Vietnamese about getting the remains of our MIAs home. There is something like normal diplomatic intercourse with these terrors of the Asian continent. And north of Vietnam there is still a Communist monolith government in China doing what Communist governments have always done, but as far as I can tell, you look on China now with a passion no more intense than a salesman's affection for a customer.

I wonder if you give yourself in any day the quiet hours of solitude that this situation requires. Do they let you alone? Do they give you time to think? Even to men with ordinary responsibilities, thinking is hard. Are you able to think? Do you make the mistake of assuming that having committed more than 400,000 troops to the desert you must, if your ultimatum is ignored, set them to fighting or *lose face*? I want to know whose face you would be losing. Do you delude yourself that it would not be a kind of criminal behavior to go to war to *save face*? I want to know whose face you would be saving. Nations are not people. Nations do not have faces—they have histories, they have constitutions, but they do not have faces. Perhaps you confuse the nation with yourself and have in mind your own face. But if I were a national leader I would welcome any degree of personal humiliation if it would preserve the life of one 18-year-old soldier. I would live content in everlasting disgrace if one paraplegic could get up and walk.

A modern nation's honor is not the honor of a warrior; it is the honor of a father providing for his children, it is the honor of a mother providing for *her* children. Surely that is the true meaning of the otherwise strange internal collapse of the Soviet superstate as well as the overthrow of its satellite governments of Eastern Europe—the universal perception of what, after all, twenty-first-century enlightenment demands.

But if you would still don the helmet, let me suggest that U.N. sanctions and embargo themselves constitute a military action. It is called a siege. As all military leaders from biblical times have understood, the siege is the most cost-effective of all military strategies. Without endangering one's own forces, it brings slow but inevitable doom to the enemy. He lives for a while on his own fat, and then he either surrenders or starves to death. And nothing need be negotiated with him because he is no longer in a position to negotiate.

I look forward with you to the day when Saddam Hussein and everything he represents is buried in the sands of the desert. All we have to do is stand here silently, in our armor, and watch it happen. And go on and see what kind of twenty-first-century world God has given us the opportunity to make.

Yours sincerely,
E.L. Doctorow

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*E.L. Doctorow is the author of* Billy Bathgate *and other novels.*

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# MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

In the course of his contemptible "book tour" to promote *An American Life* for Simon and Schuster, Ronald Reagan made an appearance on William F. Buckley's *Firing Line* and was respectfully asked about his celebrated trip to Bitburg cemetery. He replied, stupefyingly:

> Well, I called the Chancellor and told him about this, and he told me some things in addition to other things that I was receiving, he told me——See, there were supposed to be some Storm Troopers, the ones who were always in charge of the concentration camps, some Storm Troopers buried there. But he gave me the number of several Storm Troopers who were buried there in prisoners' uniforms because they had been executed for being kind to the prisoners. Well, I didn't see where it was going to do any harm then in view of that to visit this.

This new lie is too inventive to have occurred to Reagan at the time of his trip, and no German official source can shed any light on its origin. Thus, backed by the resources of a distinguished publisher, a former American President sweetens the memory of the Waffen SS. By any standards, this is a fine day's work. But then, by prevailing standards, a work of nonfiction that prettifies real-world atrocities is nothing when compared with a work of fiction that depicts imaginary ones.

Richard Snyder of Simon and Schuster, who hopes to profit by Reagan's book tour, has discovered that his conscience will not permit the publication of *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis. He had the chance to pass on the book when it was submitted. Instead, he canceled it after it had been edited, set in type and paid for. So that if Sonny Mehta of Alfred A. Knopf had not agreed to publish it under the Vintage imprint, Ellis would have been left without any recourse. Yet it is for precisely this reason that Random House/Knopf is now being threatened with boycott and outrage. The inescapable conclusion must be that if the protesters had their way, or had the power, the novel would not and could not be published at all.

I have listened often and carefully to the hotline tape that the National Organization for Women has established. The tape performs a number of interlocking and contradictory functions:

1) It furnishes a graphic reading of a passage from *American Psycho*, in which a woman is so foully raped and dismembered that one replaces the receiver feeling almost disordered with disgust.

2) It states that crimes of rape and violence against women are epidemic and on the rise.

3) It quotes numerous distinguished feminist writers as saying that no such description of the torture and slaying of a Jewish or black person would be permitted by Sonny Mehta.

4) It says that the publication by a "reputable" house promotes the action described to the level of "Americana."

5) It calls for a boycott and other forms of punishment of the publisher.

Not all of the statements made are true, and even if they were they would not be congruent with the conclusion. Given that crimes of violence against women are on the rise, for example, why does it follow that the fictional portrayal of such crime should be furiously deplored? If the offending passage is held to be an incitement to imitative or similar crimes, why put a tape of it on the wire for all to hear? Why imply that depictions of lynching or gassing would not or, much more suggestive, *should not*, be put in print? And why, if as NOW claims one in three American women will be raped in her lifetime, should one decry the elevation of a fictional recognition of the subject to the presumably privileged height of "Americana"?

As with all protests against literary expression, this one makes no sense. It makes no sense because it involves a hopeless confusion of categories. The fault, in other words, is in reality. No amount of "sensitivity" or self-censorship will put that right. Do the leaders of NOW wish that black men suspected of lust for white women had not been castrated and burned alive, or do they, as they imply, content themselves with saying that no novel dealing with the matter in detail would be decent? As for the crimes of the Final Solution, I fail to see what service is done by suggesting, as Reagan did and does, that we would all lead more wholesome lives if we tried to forget them.

It seems clear to me that in Simon and Schuster's original decision to cancel a contract with Bret Easton Ellis no matter of principle was involved. A large corporation decided to play it safe. It seems paltry and tactical to argue that the next book to suffer such a fate could be a book written by a feminist about clitoral circumcision in Muslim countries, or a novel that arouses outrage by dealing in detail with the process, but then it *is* paltry to have to make this point about the indivisibility of free expression every single time.

During the prosecution of Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, which took place in London in the late 1960s, I heard the publisher Basil Blackwell say in court that the book might or might not deprave and corrupt others but that it had certainly depraved and corrupted him. I applauded the old boy's rare candor but wished I could live in a country where such testimony could not lead to the banning of a novel. Now I do live in such a country, and marvel continually at those who do not realize how lucky they are. I have read and seen police testimony that eats the soul and disturbs the sleep far more than any novel can. My desire to stop my ears is still under control. My desire to stop the ears of others is, fortunately, under control also, and in any case would betray my favorite Amendment.

"There's no more a market," says Tammy Bruce of Los Angeles NOW, "for fiction about the torturing and skinning of women than there is for, say, fiction about the torturing and the gassing of Jews." Think about that statement, think about Ronald Reagan and Simon and Schuster and their real-world falsifications, and say if you think fiction is the problem. Which deserves the title of "Americana": *An American Life* or *American Psycho*? Try reversing the authors and titles for a start.

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# ARTICLES.

ANTIWAR MOVEMENT REDUX

# Jump-Start for The Peace Forces

TODD GITLIN

What's more remarkable, the fact that a movement against Middle East war was late or that it's here at all? In any event, what's certain is that in recent weeks—without a draft or body bags—an antiwar movement has been jump-started. For all the hesitations and crosscurrents, there's already more protest than meets most eyes, and in the wake of President Bush's postelection prewar escalation it has even begun to cross the news media threshold. A variegated and polycentric—indeed, polyphonic—movement is gathering momentum. If Bush goes to war, he will surely confront an opposition whose scale and intensity he hasn't bargained for. And if, as is to be hoped, he heeds the many voices of opposition and makes peace, this movement is in a position to make itself felt in the long process of reshaping American foreign policy after the cold war.

Lenses ground in the far-gone 1960s will miss what is unique about this movement in the making—the prominent role of Vietnam War and antiwar veterans, Christian churches, blacks, Latinos, women, soldiers' parents and improvised networks along with the usual suspects, students. This time a student movement won't necessarily lead. But even the campuses are shedding their 1980s quiescence.

Observers who do not see massive and militant demonstrations in the bellwether places (Berkeley, the Ivy League) commonly evoke "the Sixties" as proof that students today are, by and large, apathetic. They're right—as they would have been right saying the same thing at most times and in most places in the fabled S decade. The trouble is, the comparison is misplaced. It makes no sense to match the uncertain prewar present against the high tide of campus protest—1967-70, when the shooting war was several years on and American casualties numbered in the tens of thousands. The best analogue, comparison being an inexact science, is the period from 1963 through early 1965, when some 25,000 American "advisers" were on the ground in South Vietnam but the war was playing in a low key. Then, there was some campus unease—the National Student Association in 1963 condemned Ngo Dinh Diem's repressions—but antiwa demonstrations were few and small. The war was remote the populace was mostly pro-war and students were automatically deferred from the draft.

Even the dubious August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident and President Johnson's air war against North Vietnam didn't inspire much protest; like Saddam Hussein's blitzkrieg and Bush's initial deployment, they fell in August, when many were on vacation. Not until the spring of 1965, after the regular American bombing of North Vietnam had begun, did college protest become a regular feature of the political landscape; even then, apathy was the norm. That spring, 25,000 students marched in Washington, and faculty at the University of Michigan invented the teach-in, which spread to dozens of campuses.

August is, for a peace movement, the cruelest month—especially this past August, when the national peace organizations were losing members, suffering from post-cold war *tristesse* and what John Tirman, an editor of *Nuclear Times*, calls "weaponitis." The axis of preoccupation was still East-West, not North-South. Meanwhile, Congress colluded in keeping the danger of war out of its campaigns. The establishment was apparently unified. Then too, the U.S. deployment against Iraq lit few fuses under the activists of yesteryear—partly because it took antiwarriors by surprise; partly because Saddam's aggression was blatant and it is no secret that he is a torturer and mass murderer; partly because many on the left felt protective of Israel; and partly, too, because many, especially men, at first supported (or at least didn't vigorously oppose) a deployment they viewed as small, provisional, commensurate with the scale of Saddam's depredations, tied to United Nations sanctions, apparently defensive and multilateral. Antiwar Vietnam vets, by contrast, mobilized quickly. Ron Kovic, the most celebrated of them, spoke at rallies and taped an antiwar TV spot.

For all the hesitation and ambivalence, during September and October local protests hummed along at a low but steady level: a rally in downtown San Diego, a Madison chain-in, "No blood for oil" hoots at Bush in Des Moines and elsewhere, the overnight conversion of Los Angeles's HOLLYWOOD sign to OIL WAR, rallies and teach-ins at the Berkeley and Davis campuses of the University of California, a vigil at Western Michigan University, a hunger strike at Juniata College in central Pennsylvania. Along with Vietnam vets, Christian clergy were visible at the helm. Leaders sprang up among unusual suspects—most notably, Alex Molnar, a University of Wisconsin professor who, when his Marine son was shipped to Saudi Arabia, published a passionate antiwar Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* that was widely reprinted and used to scare up funds for an antiwar Military Families Support Network. Ideas for antiwar action spread via improvised networks, computerized Peacenet conferences and phone chains. By early November, activists in Somerville, Massachusetts, had pushed antiwar resolutions through the State Senate and several local city councils. Later that month, a Berkeley

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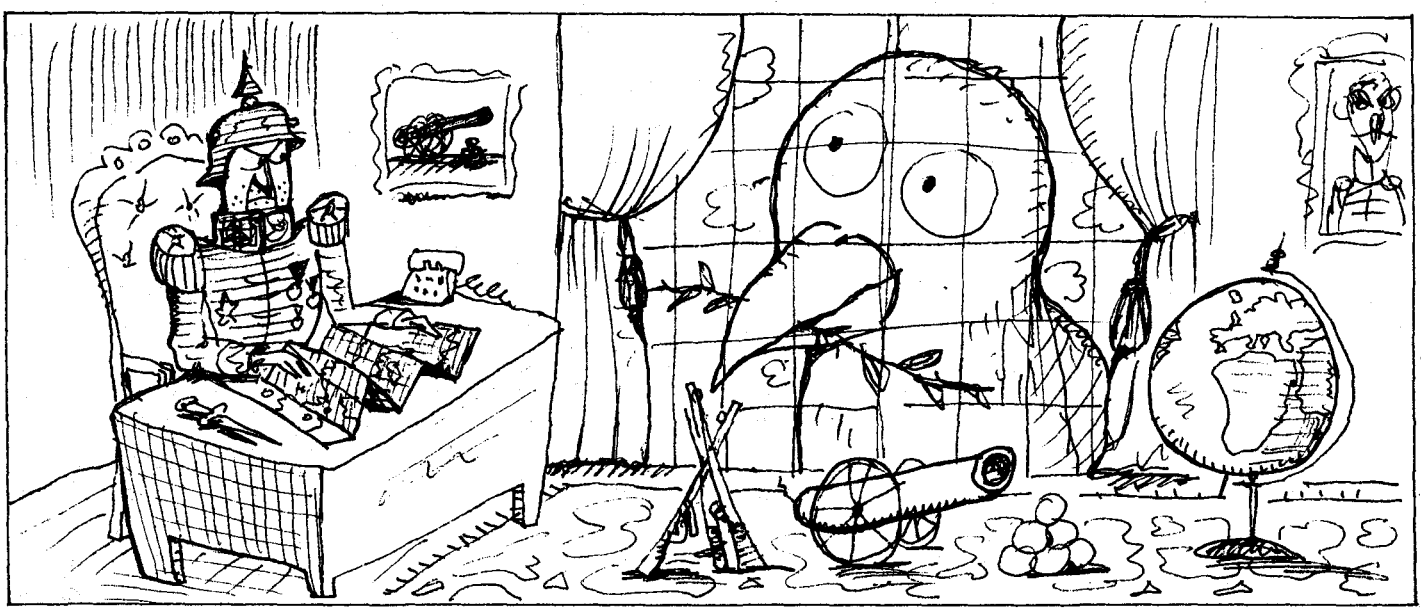
group called Working Women against the War started a phone chain to inspire antiwar calls to the White House.

Teach-ins were reinvented—sometimes by veterans of the Vietnam teach-ins of 1965, often by minority faculty, sometimes by students who had never heard the term. Some, like Berkeley's first (with 2,000 in attendance), were actually rallies, disappointing some students who wanted to hear analysis and antiwar arguments they could deploy in their dorms, not slogans. But on the campuses as elsewhere, President Bush's postelection pronunciamento of November 8, saying he was nearly doubling the troops and shipping in tanks, was the turning point. The media spotlight wheeled to antiwar clergy and former officials; antiwar Democrats also got religion. Subsequently, 1,200 students have poured into a teach-in at the University of California, Santa Barbara; 400 and then again 500 at Davis; 300 at Berkeley; 1,500 at the University of Michigan. Stanford students began a "chain fast" in November; their coalition includes a columnist for the local right-wing newspaper. By early December, broad-based regional rallies were drawing 600 in Madison, 10,000 in Boston, 5,000 in Chicago. College rallies drew 1,000 at the University of Minnesota and Stanford, 300 and again 500 at San Jose State, 250 at Indiana University, twenty at Texas A&M—where the managing editor of the student paper said, "The fact that it happened at all is pretty significant." The Student Environmental Action Coalition, probably the largest student network in the country (it drew 7,600 delegates from 1,100 campuses to an October conference), has been working on antiwar teach-ins, as have the United States Student Association, the Progressive Student Network and other student groups. Environmentalists don't have to be persuaded that oil is a dwindling resource, although their concern is ill-expressed by the popular slogan "Hell no, we won't go, we won't die for Texaco"—the oil companies could care less who controls Kuwait, and it isn't clear that war would benefit them. "We didn't think it was all about oil," says Jim Parker, an organizer at the University of Montana, "but we wanted to catch people's attention."

Perhaps the most remarkable protests have taken place at Montana. On a cold, rainy Halloween, some 600 people, most of them students, marched through downtown Missoula chanting the "Hell no" slogan and singing "Give Peace a Chance." Back on campus, they marched through school buildings and disrupted classes, sparking a controversy over their tactics. But they also lobbied a resolution through a unanimous Student Senate supporting a negotiated peace. Their coalition includes antiabortion as well as pro-choice groups (after a ruckus at one meeting, both groups agreed to take down their signs) and three fraternities along with women, Greens, African-Americans and Central America activists. They have the support of a good number of faculty as well as the university president. On a campus of 10,000 students, they have already mobilized as high a percentage of students against war as most campuses did during most of the fabled 1960s. And perhaps most remarkably, antiwar leaders have urged their supporters to send food to the troops in Saudi Arabia. They want it known—as do many other protesters—that the soldiers are not their enemies.

In Montana and elsewhere, the largest coalitions have been formed around the most elemental position—don't go to war. The Somerville resolution reads: "Because the Executive and Legislative branches of the Federal government are moving headlong into war in the Middle East, be it resolved that the citizens be heard: We want a negotiated settlement in the Middle East. We don't want war." Elsewhere, coalitions proliferate, with some on the left of the left declining to criticize the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait. Some bend language by warning that the United States plans "genocidal war" on Iraq.

The Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East, which was the first national coalition to pull itself together, around Ramsey Clark, alienated potential support by refusing to condemn the seizure of Kuwait, whereupon a second, larger coalition came together calling itself the National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East, whose preamble does criticize the Iraqi takeover, albeit timidly, and which calls for peace, immediate withdrawal of American



ILLUSTRATIONS BY J-C SUARÈS

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troops and the funding of domestic programs. Each plans a Washington demonstration, on January 19 and January 26, respectively. The Campaign urges local activities on the 19th and expects its march to be the larger. It would require a Rosetta stone to decipher the organizational intricacies, and other national networks add to the complications. Some of the activists who flock to the meetings and stay latest are the representatives of various anti-imperialist sects, veterans of many a factional war of maneuver. Tension is already manifest between those who take collective security seriously and those whose position is flatly anti-interventionist; between those who condemn Saddam and those who refrain; between those who want to organize strictly against war and those with bigger, more ambitious agendas; between on the one hand Palestinian groups and anti-imperialists who want to link the Kuwait issue with Israel-Palestine and who call for a cutoff of all American aid to the region, and on the other hand the antiwarriors—more likely Jewish—who prefer to leave Israel out of this round. Still, public opinion is sufficiently antiwar, so many on the sidelines don't care much about the slogans or the niceties of positions. Much of the right opposes war—Patrick Buchanan, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, the Cato Institute, the John Birch Society (which wants a crash program in offshore oil drilling and nuclear power) and hundreds if not thousands of talk-show callers (a University of Utah professor told me he counted twelve antiwar calls in a row on one right-wing show). Therefore antiwarriors of the left are relatively baitproof.

And so the press has been hard put to trivialize the upsurge. West Coast events have been thoroughly and straightforwardly covered by the *Los Angeles Times*, but none have received much national attention. Protest has been more conspicuous in the out-of-the-way West and Midwest than in the Northeast. Some reporters have been looking for dissent in the wrong places—the Ivy League, Berkeley—and have not noticed the Vietnam vets who blockaded the Alameda Naval Air Station on December 3, for example, or the California Labor Council, which has come out against war. Much of the press has also overlooked the minorities at antiwar rallies. (With blacks overrepresented in the gulf force, minority faculty are prominent among the organizers of teach-ins.) The *New York Times* editorial page first asked Bush for better reasons for war; hearing none, it has become steadily more critical, at this writing, of the rush to war. But the paper's news columns have reported scarcely a grassroots protest. To be a newspaper of record, *Times* editors evidently believe, means to amplify insider conversation and ignore the uncredentialed. Instead of reporting popular protest, the *Times* ran a Jason DeParle piece from Washington ("On the Left, Voices Amid Confusion," November 17) that concentrated on the conflicting views of left-of-center journal editors to the exclusion of popular movements and, at that, lagged behind the galloping antiwar consensus on the left by a full month. From the time DeParle began reporting his piece, his frame was "the split on the left," even though more than one of his sources told him that the early split was rapidly being overcome by an antiwar consensus and a surge of protest among young and old who have the audacity to lack name recognition.

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The prospect of war is not the same as war—most people do not disrupt their lives on a fifty-fifty chance that the sky may fall on the other side of the world—especially if their relations and friends are not the ones out there in the desert under an unsheltering sky. The prospect of war is not on everyone's lips; as usual, many students do not follow the news much at all. "The thing that upsets me," says Rosa Ehrenreich, an organizer of Harvard protests, "is that Harvard students just aren't worried about the possibility of a war occurring. . . . They say that Harvard students are the future leaders of the world, but I think it would be nice if they paid more attention to important world issues now." But apathy and parochialism will not keep the campuses from exploding if American forces go to war. War offers the disparate activists a chance to submerge, for the moment, their differences—if they play their cards right and, in particular, refrain from recapitulating Middle East war in their own ranks. In the case of war, the rally-round-the-flag impulse will dissipate quickly. As body bags are off-loaded at Dover Air Force Base, campuses and communities are likely to polarize, with the potential for violent clashes. Antiwar sentiment will surely mushroom, taking a variety and sometimes a muddle of forms—pacifist, multilateralist, anti-imperialist, isolationist, even anti-Semitic (there are already those who mutter about the prospect of what they call a "Jew war").

War on Iraq would be no weekend war—no Grenada, Libya, Panama. The gore of combat over weeks or months would bring demonstrators into the streets in the tens or hundreds of thousands. Organizer Lisa Parks at the University of Montana says: "I know a lot of people who are against the Bush Administration's deployment, but until an actual shot is fired those people will not come out of their closets. 'I'm not going to demonstrate until people start dying,' they've told me, which I think is idiocy. If we do go to a full-fledged war, it'll be interesting to see them join us." The Montana protesters already have a plan: As soon as the first shot is fired, boycott classes and march to City Hall. Local coalitions have their own day-after plans.

Almost certainly Bush did not reckon on this recoil. Now he must take it into account. With elites largely antiwar and pro-war sentiment soft, the doves stand only to multiply. With public opinion starting out polarized, war would mean

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confrontations between hawks who think the way to support American troops is to support war (antiwarriors were spat upon at a rally in Ventura, California, on December 2) and doves who think the way to support American troops is to bring them home. The resulting tumult would stand a strong chance of dividing Republicans, pushing many Democrats into opposition and proving, in the end, a political disaster for President Bush—as was the case for Lyndon Johnson, the last President to stake his career on a quick win against "a pissant little country." Johnson stared himself blind at that famous light at the end of the tunnel. Will Bush? □

LETTER FROM EUROPE

# The Last Superpower

DANIEL SINGER

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Paris at the end of November, might best be described by reversing Tolstoy's title. This was Peace and War. Everything had been carefully staged for a huge peace jamboree attended by thirty-four heads of state or government, their foreign secretaries and a host of civil servants. The agenda for this official ending of the cold war included the signing of a treaty that would drastically reduce conventional weapons in Europe and a solemn declaration that East and West were no longer in conflict.

As forty-five years had passed since the end of World War II, the meeting could not really be called a peace conference. In a sense, it was the opposite—the closure of a long period of peace, the dismantling of the postwar settlement and the funeral of Yalta. Fittingly enough, the loser of the last war was now the prizewinner. Paris witnessed the official re-entry of a reunited Germany as chief actor on the European stage; within days, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was to reap the electoral dividends of this triumph.

It all duly happened as planned. There was even an additional drama in the form of the sudden exit of Maggie Thatcher (Versailles being the perfect setting for the fall of this lady, who came in the end to believe that she personified not only *l'état* but the whole of British society). And yet, for all this, it was an anticlimax. The Paris jamboree was overshadowed by the Persian Gulf crisis and the end of the cold war by the threat of a hot one. It was obvious from the start that George Bush and James Baker had come to Europe to get the blessing, and the signatures, of the other members of the United Nations Security Council, and this backroom bargaining ended up dominating the proceedings.

The whole exercise was complicated. It was a sort of *mésentente cordiale*, or rather an ambiguous agreement on the need to condemn Iraqi aggression. There were some differences of emphasis: While the United States insisted on ruling out any concessions, even face-saving ones, the Europeans (with the exception of the vanishing lady) stressed the need for patience in seeking a peaceful solution. But the European reservations were mild. Ever since Mikhail Gorbachev abandoned the role of antagonist to the Americans, no one has taken his place—certainly neither Kohl nor French President François Mitterrand. The pliant Europeans gained no more than a fortnight's grace, the right to strike being postponed from January 1 to January 15. Washington then had only to exchange its amnesia over Tiananmen Square for China's promise not to use its Security Council veto and everything was set for the U.N. resolution authorizing the use of "all necessary means" to secure Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

On reflection, it may be wrong to describe the conference as an anticlimax. There was in fact a deep logical connection between the Paris package and the Middle East crisis. What was foreshadowed by the post-Yalta settlement outlined in the French capital? The collapse of the Warsaw Pact renders the justification of NATO as a "shield against Soviet invasion" ridiculous. Also, the end of the cold war makes the U.S. presence in Europe very precarious. Potentially, it strips the United States—now the only superpower—of its function as military master of the alliance and, therefore, of its advantage over its Western partners (who are, at the same time, its economic rivals). Finally, it raises an even bigger question, one that worries not only the "military-industrial complex." For nearly half a century the West's economic progress and its "miracles" have been dependent on a system that rests on military output. But will it now be able to function properly without such wasteful production?

Miraculously, as if in a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*, the Iraqi expedition has provided a partial solution to all these problems. It enables U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to proclaim in Brussels that NATO must confront new dangers, including "the spread of chemical and ballistic arms in the Middle East and possible threats to energy supplies." It gives the armorers a new lease on life and a renewed feeling of confidence. It provides the United States with an opportunity to gain a firmer foothold in the Middle East and a stronger control over oil prices. And finally, it allows Washington to claim that a military alliance is still badly needed, with special treatment required for its leader. All of this seemed so convenient that when Europe learned of U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie's message to Baghdad—warning of the dire consequences of an invasion of Saudi Arabia, though not of Kuwait—this was interpreted here less as a misunderstanding than as an invitation. As far as the White House was concerned, the argument ran, if Saddam Hussein didn't exist, he would have had to be invented.

This judgment of Paris, raising what may have been only blunders on Bush's part to the status of Machiavellian calculation, may be too pat, too linear, too Cartesian. After all, the economic consequences of the crisis are also alarming for the United States. War could spell political doom for the President and, at the moment, he is meeting more resist-

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ance at home than from his allies. Whatever the outcome, however, there is no denying that in this post-Yalta world the United States is jockeying to preserve its leadership role, even to the point of bullying. Its handling of the U.N. illustrates this point.

It is now fashionable to say that the U.N. is at last coming into its own, fulfilling the hopes of its founders. But that is not quite accurate. It is true that when they set up this new organization, the victorious Allies were relying on the five permanent members of the Security Council to police the globe. They relied mainly on the Soviet Union and the United States—the two supergendarmes, soon to become the nuclear superpowers. The assumption was that if the leaders of the two blocs agreed on a solution, they would be able to impose it on the world at large.

But the superpowers disagreed and the mechanism did not function. (The only previous occasion when the U.N. authorized the use of force was during the Korean War, and then only because the Soviet Union had boycotted the Security Council.) Now, the end of the cold war does not mean the reconciliation of the two competing political systems but the bankruptcy of one of them. In other words, what we are being offered to keep order and to preserve the status quo across the globe is one superpoliceman—the U.S. sheriff—assisted by four deputies (with two more, Germany and Japan, bound to be co-opted if the new setup is to work).

Paradoxically, in its struggle to stay on top Washington has less to fear from its Russian rival than from its European partners, and as time runs out, the United States gives every impression of wanting to force the Europeans' hand. The breakdown in Brussels on December 7 of the so-called Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations is a good example. Admittedly the Europeans, worried about the reaction of their farmers' lobby, may have been less than flexible. But the United States gave the clear impression of preferring a break to a compromise.

The gulf crisis has confirmed that Western Europe is still far from speaking with one voice. On the other hand, the next few years will be crucial for European integration. By 1993 the European Economic Community should have its single market. The following year it should start moving toward a joint monetary policy and a common European central bank. Kohl and Mitterrand have just written to their colleagues suggesting in vague terms that the search for a common foreign and defense policy should be speeded up as well.

Each of these transformations can be accomplished in different ways. The elaboration of a joint military policy, for instance, may be carried out either inside or outside the NATO framework, and this choice will in turn have an impact on the foreign policy of the European Community. Similarly, in an increasingly global economy, economic integration can be managed with a greater or lesser degree of conflict between Europe's multinationals and their U.S. or Japanese counterparts. The departure of Thatcher seems here to symbolize a trend: the weakening of those politicians who, in Churchill's famous words, often quoted by de Gaulle, "between Europe and the open sea" would always choose the open sea—that is to say, the American alliance. Even so it remains unclear what role will eventually be played by the German Chancellor—a crucial figure—as the Americans give the impression of trying to forge their supremacy while the iron is hot.

Naturally, we are talking here about the relationship with the more prosperous half of Europe, beginning with the twelve-member Common Market. The odds are that by the year 2000, the other advanced capitalist countries—the Scandinavian trio of Sweden, Norway and Finland, plus Switzerland and Austria—will have left the European Free Trade Association and joined the Twelve. The future of the other half of Europe is much less certain. The loose talk of a European confederation cannot conceal the fundamental difference between the privileged members of the club and the outsiders. As the capitalist invasion of Eastern Europe boosts the army of the unemployed, those in the West who used to preach freedom of movement are now alarmed by the prospect. The specter of mass migration from the East haunts the European commissioners in Brussels; already, the Austrians have sent troops to protect their eastern frontier. The Oder-Neisse line may soon be the new wall, the new frontier between Europe's haves and its have-nots. After the euphoria of 1989 there is now some awakening.

This is not the only reason for having a bitter taste in one's mouth. Today, when Western Europe seems to have the chance to follow its own independent path for the first time since the war, it is not independence but imitation that leads the way. What is the use of an "independent" culture that only produces a local version of American soap operas? How valuable is the "freedom" of the press that allows the Murdochs and Maxwells to produce the *Daily Drug* for mass consumption? More worrying still is the impression that Europe is inheriting more and more American prejudices—

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that private is perfect and that public, by definition, is suspicious; that charity is good, while social redistribution is harmful. With the deutsche mark supreme, even the Swedish welfare state is apparently to be sacrificed on the altar of financial orthodoxy. We may have a long way to go, but we are clearly moving in the wrong direction.

The complaint here is, quite obviously, not so much about the political setbacks that the left has suffered in Western Europe as about its ideological bankruptcy. It is often said these days that the Western left is paying a price for its failure to dissociate itself from the Soviet model of socialism. But that indictment is both unfair and rather inaccurate. Granted, the discrediting of "socialism" because of the failure of the Eastern European regimes may, through guilt by nominal association, cost the Italian Communists or the German Social Democrats some votes. Yet these losses are marginal, they are likely to be temporary and they are not at all due to any failure to hold Moscow at arm's length. The Western European left is paying a price for its own sins, for what it did or rather didn't do, for its incapacity to replace the shattered Soviet model with a radical project of its own.

This impotence has become particularly striking in the past fifteen years or so. When the economic crisis of the mid-1970s put an end to postwar expansion, driving the capitalist establishment to its own *perestroika* and right-wing offensive, the Western left was trapped in the old consensus politics and lost its bearings. It has never recovered. The left has paid the penalty for its macho misunderstanding of feminism and for the productivist fixation that prevented it from attacking the existing division of labor and rendered it blind to the vital ecological dimension. The trade union movement has been punished for its inability to adapt to the changing structure of the labor force: the destruction of traditional working-class strongholds and the mass inflow of women and immigrant workers.

The left is reaping the harvest of its failure to reinvent socialist democracy, its incapacity to persuade people that the welfare state need not be a distant, inhuman leviathan or that planning, far from being a ukase from above, should be a form of social self-organization. Forgetting the essence of socialism, namely that it is a search for the people's mastery over their own fate, the left has allowed the term to be identified, in the West as well as the East, with Orwell's *1984*.

"Ex Oriente Lux," wrote Stalin on the morrow of the October Revolution. It can now be asserted that the light will not come from the East, at least not in the immediate historical period. True, the Polish election, with the meteoric rise of the unknown Stan Tyminski, came as a shock to the International Monetary Fund pundits and their paymasters. The capitalist invasion of Eastern Europe will not be as smooth as they reckoned and the working class will not be docile forever. The reawakening may come sooner than expected. Yet it will take time. Not only Eastern Europe but also the Soviet Union itself will have to go through capitalist purgatory before new movements can be revived there around a new socialist project.

The Western left could speed up this process by its own


## 1991 ROBERT MASUR FELLOWSHIP AWARDED TO MAURICE M. FELLER

The Nation Institute is pleased to announce that Maurice M. Feller of Tallahassee, Florida, is the recipient of the 1991 Robert Masur Legal Fellowship. Named in memory of public interest attorney Robert Masur, the fellowship is awarded annually to a law student with a demonstrated commitment to public interest law.

Maurice M. Feller is a third-year law student at Florida State University College of Law. Currently Mr. Feller is the president of the National Lawyers Guild chapter on his law school campus where he has developed several innovative projects. He organized a one-day boycott of classes by nearly 40 percent of the students to protest the lack of minorities and women on the faculty. Last fall the N.L.G. held a symposium on civil rights commemorating the 35th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 25th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Mr. Feller founded and recently launched the *Journal of Progressive Legal Thought*. In addition, he is teaching "street law" at a local high school; representing a Cuban detainee at an Immigration and Naturalization Service hearing; and organizing F.S.U. law students to go to a small town in rural northern Florida for an anti-Klan rally. He formerly served as vice president of the law school chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

During the spring semester, Mr. Feller will work with the Supreme Court Watch Project of The Nation Institute.

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The conference will also discuss ways to thwart efforts to justify continuation or expansion of the national security apparatus in the name of fighting "international terrorism" or the "war on drugs."

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The registration fee of $50 will include two luncheon programs, admission to all workshops, and a copy of the public policy report, "Ending the Cold War at Home."

**For further information or registration, please contact:**

**Gene Guerrero/ACLU**
**National Conference on Ending the Cold War at Home**
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example. But it can do so only by relying on its own forces, which have been disoriented rather than assisted by the wind blowing from the East. It must also move rapidly, for the disappearance of frontiers in Western Europe will force the labor movement to choose between internationalist solutions and political suicide. Necessity may be the mother of invention. But that is not the same as saying that when a project is historically necessary one is bound to be found. Judging by the utter failure of Mitterrand, Spain's Felipe Gonzalez or Britain's Neil Kinnock to provide even the semblance of an alternative during the current Middle East crisis, the left in Europe will require new movements, new ideas and new leaders. Until they emerge, the American sheriff, though clearly of pensionable age, can cling to the conviction that the world is his turf. □

ROMANIA A YEAR LATER

# The Winter of Our Discontent

PAUL HOCKENOS

*Timisoara, Romania*

During the days of the dictatorship, Romania's darkness seemed inextricably bound up with the terror of President Nicolae Ceausescu's rule. But a year after the tyrant's overthrow, the post-revolutionary euphoria has long faded. As winter afternoons turn to dusk, the same eerie glow illuminates hours-long queues and sparsely stocked shelves. The police state is gone, but revived national hatreds and outbreaks of mob violence have filled the vacuum. Across the country, the mood is as grim as ever.

Since the bloody December 1989 revolution, Romania has established a constitutional democracy and held multiparty elections. Yet the legacy of its turbulent history continues to mar its integration into the European mainstream. Racked by ethnic tension, mass protests and its own heavy-handed violence, the ruling National Salvation Front (F.N.S.) maintains a tenuous grip on power. Behind the scenes in Bucharest, power is wielded and contested by rival military factions and the former security apparatus. Outside the halls of the presidential palace, protest movements challenge the beleaguered government from the streets. The country's economic collapse—industrial output plummeted by 28 percent and domestic investment by 45 percent in the first nine months of 1990—further jeopardizes its political stability.

Romania's complex political dynamics are still heavily informed by the murky events of the revolution. Since the front's takeover, the outlines of the Bucharest power structures have become increasingly transparent. When now-President Ion Iliescu and the front's inner circle took power on December 22, 1989, they justified their authority by claiming to be representatives of a popular, spontaneous overthrow of the state. In fact, coup plans between Ceausescu's onetime old guard (which later became the F.N.S. leadership) and the military's top brass had been in the works for more than a decade. When nationwide demonstrations finally broke out in late December, a contingency plan was set in motion. Ceausescu loyalists within the Romanian Army, who had been firing on demonstrators until the night of December 21, abruptly shifted sides and the front grabbed power. Days later, after Ceausescu's execution, the bulk of the specialized paramilitary police force, the Securitate, had laid down their weapons. It was clear that deals had been struck and that the military and the Securitate had been insured safe places within the future ruling structures.

The front's past and its uneasy partnership with the military have left an indelible mark on the country's new democracy. While the government of Prime Minister Petre Roman includes a core of uncompromised liberals and technocrats, the logic of the single-party security state surfaces again and again in the actions of the ruling clique. Sections of the *nomenklatura* are periodically dismissed, but the bureaucracy lives on relatively intact. Show trials of Ceausescu's son and of his brother, a former general, and other Securitate higher-ups barely conceal the fact that the security apparatus itself operates as before—and often still occupies the same offices. Phones are still tapped, and opposition activists are harassed but not usually arrested. The mass media are also tightly controlled, which gave the F.N.S. a decisive advantage over opposition parties in the May vote.

The front's landslide election victory won the government a short-lived semblance of popular legitimacy. Five months after forty years of stifling Stalinism had come to a close, a thoroughly depoliticized people went to the polls. The F.N.S. political program—social democracy, market economics, European integration—was only marginally significant. Improved food supplies at election time, engineered by reversing Ceausescu's policy of exporting meat and agricultural products, delivered the F.N.S. a heavy turnout. For the majority who watched the revolution on television, Iliescu and some extra sausage appeared as Christmas presents in 1989. "The bad father Ceausescu was simply replaced by the good father Iliescu," noted one activist. But the allegiance expires when the sausages are gone.

The illusion of popular legitimacy was shattered overnight on June 14 when Iliescu ordered miners from the Jiu Valley to clear protesters from Bucharest's University Square. The violent scenes of the miners bludgeoning students with clubs so soon after the bloodshed of December vitiated the vote of confidence that the F.N.S. had won a month before. The international community halted all economic assistance to Romania. Within the front, strife over the move signaled the escalation of long-simmering friction between the liberal wing and the old guard. And few in Bucharest believe that the ransacking of the radio and TV station was led by the student demonstrators, as Iliescu claimed, though it's unclear who was actually responsible.

The refusal of the army and the police to put down that

*Paul Hockenos is a Budapest-based writer.*

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"foreign-inspired fascist counterrevolution" exposed the acute power struggle between Iliescu and the armed forces and within the military itself. The armed forces appear divided into at least three factions. One, integral to the putsch plans since the first days of the conspiracy, is loyal to the front and is content to operate from behind the government's democratic facade. However, nationalist and strong-arm elements—a coalition with a well-documented tradition in Romanian history—have flexed their muscles more than once over the past year. With power bases in Transylvania and the eastern part of the country, the nationalist forces object to the front's leftist leanings and its "timid" approach to national questions. Ever more clear is that they have the support of Ceausescu's formerly loyal generals and the Securitate, who resent their demoted status. Speculation is rife that the disillusioned military hierarchy was behind the June events in Bucharest and the ethnic violence in Transylvania last spring, aiming on both occasions to incite further unrest. Had the miners been unwilling to intervene in Bucharest, the military would have had a free hand to push Iliescu aside in the name of law and order.

A third faction comes from the army's middle and lower ranks, where an independent democratic consciousness persists. The only one to go public, it represents a vaguely defined set of democratic ideals. This group was the critical revolutionary force in December. Among the population, many see the armed forces' rank and file as the country's last check against a relapse into dictatorship. The democracy movement in the army coalesced in February 1990 when the Committee for the Defense of the Romanian Army's Rights and the Committee for Action to Democratize the Army (CADA) were formed. The demands of CADA, which comprises officers and soldiers from more than sixty units nationwide, included the removal of all personnel implicated in the December repression, the replacement of the Defense Minister with a civilian and improved living conditions for soldiers. After demonstrations by hundreds of military personnel and thousands of supporters in Bucharest, Timisoara and Topraisar, Prime Minister Roman grudgingly met with the group and agreed to improve material conditions. A week later, the compromised Defense Minister was sacked and hundreds of officers demoted. Banned by Iliescu after the miners' debacle, CADA resurfaced in October. And in November, two groups of unidentified officers joined forces with a newly formed opposition group, Civic Alliance, which is clearly opposed to the front.

The alignments within the military reflect the diverse and fragmented practical constellations across the country. The political parties, all of which are nationalist in orientation, are without broad popular support and have splintered since the elections. In the May election, the highest vote getter behind the front was the party of the Hungarian minority, which received 9 percent of the ballot. The Romanian Orthodox Church, no small factor in the country's political history, is also divided. A lay strain in the church backs a burgeoning populist, grass-roots reform movement, while the hierarchy fulfills its traditional role as supporter of whoever is in power.

A wave of strikes this autumn has radicalized the young labor movement, which is split between the front-oriented successor to the old state-run union (still heavily infiltrated by the Securitate) and a host of upstart independent unions. The independents have incurred the government's wrath with their increasingly political demands, which include "the destruction of totalitarian structures, the immediate democratization of labor activity" and full-speed-ahead market reforms. Rising unemployment and a six-month government moratorium on workers' demands have also led to disgruntlement within the front union's rank and file. Even the Jiu Valley miners, smarting from the outcry over the June crackdown, are no longer solidly behind the front.

Romania's opposition movements, including the military and the trade unions, possess a regional dimension that varies significantly across the country. In Bucharest, the democracy movement has rebounded with vigor since the June crackdown. The first priority of the opposition there, led mostly by the young student activists at the forefront of the December revolt, is the F.N.S.'s resignation. Until the front is ousted and the entire bureaucracy swept clean, they maintain, democracy in Romania is impossible.

Beneath their legitimate democratic demands, however, lies a commitment to anti-Communist, nationalist traditions no less authoritarian than those that they oppose. The country's lack of progressive traditions and the absence of any experience of a functioning civil society, as well as the effects of a doctrinaire education, have left the rebels with only the dominant ideologies of the past—monarchy, militarism and fascism—to replace Communism. The resurgence of national and religious values has led to a nationwide reappraisal of the 1941-44 regime of Nazi-collaborator Gen. Ion Antonescu. In University Square, most demon-

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strators see the 1930s as a positive model for democracy and Antonescu as a "great patriot." In the university's philosophy department, the anti-Semitic theories of the fascist philosophers of the interwar period are now in vogue. "One can't blame the ideas themselves for the extreme form they took," says the editor of the Student League's now-defunct newspaper. "It's said that Jews and Gypsies were killed. But if I had to choose between Hitlerism and Communism, I wouldn't choose Communism."

For tactical reasons the front has avoided unnecessarily inflaming the volatile passions of nationalism. Yet at the same time it has done nothing to dampen those passions when they might prove politically expedient. This has created a vacuum, leaving the opposition free to capitalize on charged issues such as the status of the Soviet Republic of Moldavia on Romania's eastern frontier, 65 percent of whose people are ethnic Romanians. The opposition and front loyalists alike insist it is only a matter of time before Romania is reunified with Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, both of which were annexed by the U.S.S.R. in 1940 under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Iliescu, who claims to be on good terms with Gorbachev, has played down the explosive topic, which could well be the vehicle that brings the nationalists to power. The republic's ruling nationalist Moldavian People's Front, elected in June, is already a step ahead of the Romanian President, using the reappraisal of Antonescu to justify a Greater Romania as well as a blatant antiminority policy. (Antonescu recaptured the two regions from the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944.) The M.P.F.'s crude nationalism has already brought its own peoples to the brink of civil war. Were the poverty-stricken republic, with its 4.3 million inhabitants, actually to join Romania, the nationalist reverberations would surely be felt in Budapest and beyond.

In the northwestern region of Transylvania, an ugly neo-fascist movement has already taken root. There, the conflict is between the 2 million–strong Hungarian minority and the Romanian ultranationalist group Vatra Romaneasca (Romanian Homeland, or the Hearth of Romania). Vatra poses as a Romanian cultural organization but espouses a vicious anti-Hungarian (as well as anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy) rhetoric that has dashed hopes of interethnic rapprochement. Manipulating the potent xenophobia nurtured by the dictatorship, the group, which includes former Securitate and military chiefs, has successfully roused old fears of Hungarian irredentism among Transylvanian Romanians.

Tension climaxed in March when Romanians and Hungarians clashed in Tirgu Mures, leaving several people dead. (Helsinki Watch says five people died but local sources say at least thirty were killed.) The melee brought the festering antagonism between Bucharest and Budapest to the surface, as peoples and politicians in both countries rose aggressively to the defense of their respective nationalities. Since March, the reconciliation process has come to a halt. "There's no politics now in Transylvania," said one Hungarian human rights activist. "It's simply one nationality pitted against the other."

If a bright spot exists, it is in the Banat region of western Romania. In the capital city of Timisoara, the site of the revolution's first demonstrations, democratic consciousness is at its strongest and nationalist emotions are markedly less pronounced. Although the movement is small in contrast to Bucharest's, Iliescu knows well that he faces deep popular and military resistance in the Banat. Should events take a dramatic turn in Bucharest, a conflict between the eastern and western regions cannot be ruled out.

The winter ahead, most Romanians now realize, will be colder and hungrier than those that precipitated the revolution. Fallout from the Persian Gulf crisis and the Romanian government's economic "shock therapy" plan has already exacerbated the autumn's wave of protests and strikes. Austerity measures, a critical precondition for future International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans, have sent prices spiraling by as much as 400 percent. A general strike was only narrowly averted in mid-December by postponing the second phase of price liberalization until July.

The fall of the government, which could spark civil war, would have serious repercussions throughout the region. Border changes in the east or ethnic conflict in the northwest could also trigger dangerous chain reactions in neighboring states, fueling equally nasty nationalist movements there. The recent exodus of refugees from the Soviet Union and the Balkans who have "swamped" the West is minuscule compared with the tens of millions predicted should famine or war strike Eastern or Central Europe.

Romania's isolation from the European integration process leaves it even more vulnerable. Washington has reprimanded the front for its human rights violations and is leading the campaign to keep the country shut off from international aid. The policy has Bucharest officials baffled after the United States' decades-long friendship with Ceausescu. If Europe is really to enter a new era of peaceful coexistence, the troubling developments in post-Communist Eastern Europe must be assigned international priority. The alternative is a redivision of Europe marked by poverty, regional wars and the very real threat of fascism. □

WHITE HOUSE DIARY

# Prez Has *Really* Had It w/Iraq

DOUGLAS McGRATH

*Oct. 1*: Sr. staff met for numbers and strategy at new HQ for Department of Polling and Opinion Gathering (DOPOG). *Everything's* going our w.: got a budget deal yest. with the Dems and election prosp's v. good in Tex., Fla. and Ca. Dar unveiled plans to deal w/recession. Starting today, no one will refer to it as "the recession." Will call it "the pre-recovery." ("Language is a tool," Dar said, "and we must misuse it to

*Douglas McGrath is writing a screenplay for Hollywood Pictures.*

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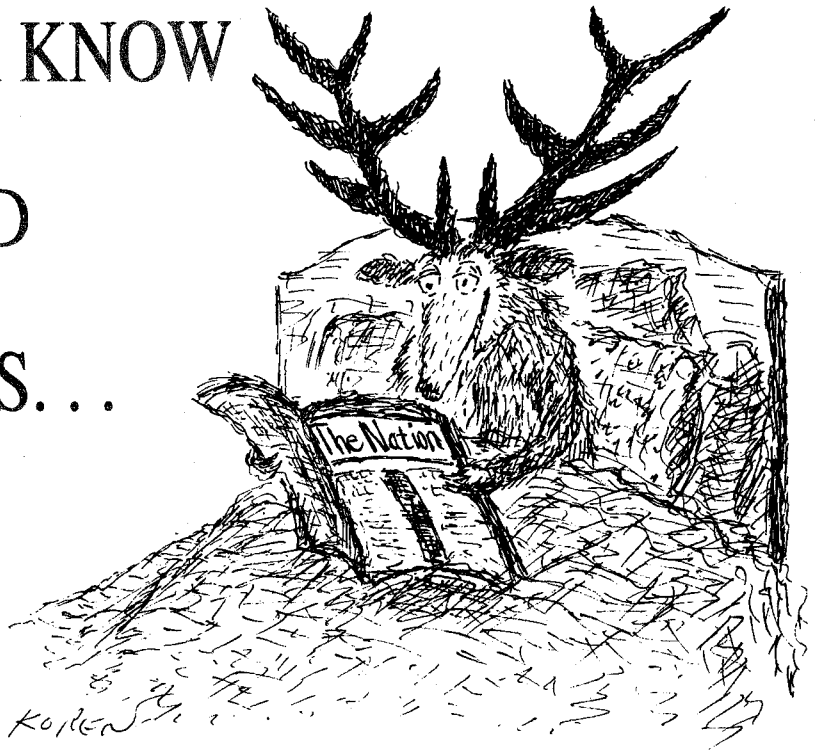
# YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU'LL FIND BETWEEN THE COVERS. . .

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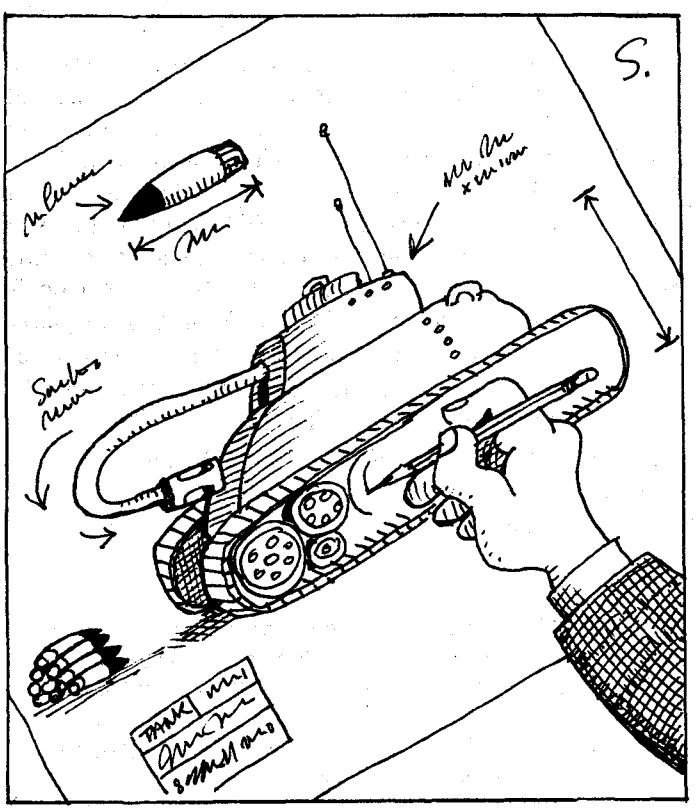
our benefit.") Sunu said anyone caught saying "recession" will be banned from squash for a month. "There is only one time when it is advantageous to speak of a recession," he said. "And that's when a Democrat is President."

Prez skipped meeting. He said, "I've got to get this war with Iraq in the bank." Then he laughed and said, "Oh, excuse me. I mean I've got to let the sanctions work!" On his way to Pentagon to visit the secret Hall of Bombs, he told reporters, "I have had it with Iraq!" (To cut down on these trips to view bombs, Pent. is drawing up a Catalogue of Bombs, and Prez can just mail-order from the WH.)

*Oct. 2*: Prez addressed nation to rally support for the budget compromise. Here is the speech, most of which Sunu wrote: "Good evening. The White House and the Congressional leadership have come up with a budget compromise to put America's fiscal house in order. Legislators in both parties have put together a package for which we all share the same enthusiasm: We hate it. It is a bad, bad budget. But it is the best bad budget we could come up with and we all hate it equally. That's important. We all hate it. If ever, during the long months of negotiations in that small, cramped room, something was put in that wasn't offensive to every single person present, we took it out. Yanked it right out of there, the way Saddam Hussein is yanking Kuwaiti kidneys off dialysis machines over there. And I'm here tonight to ask for your support, because the idea of going back to that small, smelly room again and talking about this for even one more minute gives me the Willie Wonkas. Not possible. I pasadena. Rather eat a big old plate of broccoli. Thank you and God bless America."

It was the shortest speech ever given by a Prez on national TV (72% of the people Teet polled thought it was a commercial).



*Oct. 3*: Trouble in Texas race. Claytie Williams told a reporter that he used to go to whorehouses in Mexico "cause that was the only way you could get serviced back then." Teet says gender gap developing. So Sunu told me to unlock Q.'s office and send him to Texas. Baker said Q. is prob. the only man in America who can make Claytie Williams look smart. Q. overheard this and said, "Thanks!"

Big NSC meeting on Iraq. Prez v. concerned re: poll that says 9 out of 10 Americans do not want US to start a war. Baker said, "So make it look like Iraq started it." Prez said, "But nearly half of the pollees out there said they wouldn't believe it if we said that Iraq had started the war." Baker thought about this and said, "A vital task lies before us. If we ever want to deceive the public on any kind of regular basis, we must first restore their faith in government."

*Oct. 5*: Everyone in foul mood since budget deal killed in House. Howev., both parties opposed it, so at least Prez can say he got the bipartisan cooperation he wanted. Privately, Prez furious w/Gingrich, who led GOP opposish. "The Grinch really rip-corded us on this one. He will rue the day he did this to me. Mark my Ward Cleavers on this one: Day. Grinch. Going to rue it." Grinch's big prob., of course, was the new Ts, but to make it look like the budge really will be balanced in 5 years, we had to make some optimistic economic predictions that others are challenging as well: 1) that oil prices will fall, 2) that Germany will repay its war debts from WWI and 3) that 8 out of every 10 people will forget they are owed change at the post office.

Five more US soldiers died today: 2 in a crash as they took off from Fort Bragg; 2 in a training exercise in Saudi A. and 1 unloading a good-will shipment of canned goods from the Shriners. This brings total of prewar dead to 41. To keep public support, Prez wants some ennobling phrases he can use to make the deaths part of a great cause. I've thought of "Died on the Way" and "Practiced to Death." Q. suggested, "Remember the canned goods!" Meanwhile, Prez told reporters, "I continue to have had it with Iraq!"

*Oct. 8*: Q. trip to Texas a fiasco. Here's how he defended Claytie: "Some people were offended by Claytie's remarks that he went to a Mexican whorehouse. Well, I have talked to Claytie Williams and I think I can clear up any confusion that may have caused. He did not, I repeat, *did not* in any way mean any disrespect to American whores. He thinks that American whores are among the best whores working in the world today. And the Bush Administration agrees with him!" Sunu immediately ordered aides to put Q. back on the plane. I'll lock him in his office a.s.a. he returns. Instead will send Reagan to Texas. RR is the unqualified candidate's ideal: He is proof that not only can someone without any working knowledge of anything be elected to a major office, he can be re-elected.

*Got a note from my agent. Said since I am unknown to the public, for my inside-the-White-House book to be a breakthrough best seller, I need something to grab people's attensh. She suggested getting my hands on some incriminating documents. This may be hard. Prez is so obsessed w/secrecy that as soon as a document is read, it must be shredded, the shreds must be burned and the ashes must be*

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*flown to a secret base in the Philippines, which we then bomb. But if it'll help me get a best seller, I'll try.*

*Oct. 9*: Maybe our worst day yet. Prez flip-flopped 4 times on the new Ts. First he said he will never allow tax rates to be raised. Then he said he would allow rates to be raised if cap gains is cut. Then he said the Dems wouldn't let him. You've got to hand it to him: He's *trying* to break all his campaign promises—Congress just won't let him.

Meanwhile, Prez putting big presh on Israel to allow UN study of Palestinian killings. This v. imp. to Prez so anti-Iraq coalition doesn't split. Shamir v. resistant. As Prez stressed how important an investigation was, Shamir kept saying, "What? I can't hear a word you're saying! This connection is terrible!" So, as a test, Prez said, "Also we are considering selling you a lot of new weapons," and Shamir said, "There we go! Now I can hear you perfectly!"

## *Prez: 'Now I've really, really had it, and I'm going to continue having it till Saddam Hussein de-invades Kuwait!'*

*Oct. 15*: Gorb. wins Peace Prize. Shevy called and said that under the circs, USSR can't support use of force right at this minute. Shevy said to call back after Gorb. picks up prize. This just as well since Schwarzy called and said that 30% of our new tanks have the guns pointing inward. Pow immed. called Chrysler, which made the tanks. They confirmed the problem but said not to worry. Tests show guns have never hit their targets.

Prez, meanwhile, keeping up the presh on Iraq. Prez told reporters, "The meter on the Bush patience has been running and I'm just about to turn it off because I have really, really had it with Iraq!"

*Oct. 18*: Reagan's agent called Sunu this A.M. about RR's appearance in Texas. "My client's price is $3 million," Mr. Ovitz said. "Plus points. He got 2 to go to Japan and he had to split that with Nancy. As a solo, he gets 3. 3's his quote."

Sunu: "But this isn't business. This is politics."

Ovitz: "That's why we're charging 3. If it was charity, we'd let you have him for 2. Also, jellybeans in the dressing room and he doesn't like the red ones. Pick those out."

*Oct. 23*: Prez having a hard time on the campaign trail. Everyone is distancing themselves from him. At a rally today the candidate the Prez was speaking for led the crowd in a chant of "Wimp! Wimp! Wimp!" Prez tried to put a good face on all of it: "Some of the pundits out there, up there on the Hill and down there in that place down below up there on the Hill, are trying to stir up a rumpus about 'divisions' in our party. Well, I say, hey! Just start destirring cause it isn't gonna work. They say, hey, Mr. President, looks like you're on both sides of that ideological fence. And I say to them, number one, right out of the gate: 'You *bet* the Republican Party is on both sides of the fence and that's good for the American public out there, because that means that one way or another, we've got your position! The Democrats always say they're pro-choice, but *we give it to you*!'"

Media have gotten wind of the Chrysler tanks that fire inside the tank only. Emergency meeting at which we unan. agreed that public must not believe this story. Decided that easiest way to prove it wrong is to order 100 more tanks.

*Oct. 28*: Dar appeared on *This Week With David Brinkley*. Donaldson pressed him v. hard to admit recession. Dar handled it like a master: "The expansion is being successfully streamlined and we are enjoying a period of vigorous inverted growth." To keep public's attensh off the econ., Prez told reporters, "I have really, really had it with Iraq, and I'm going to keep having had it till Saddam Hussein de-invades Kuwait!"

*Nov. 7*: Election news pretty bleak. Claytie Williams lost. He was asked by a reporter whom he voted for; he couldn't remember. Best news is that Gingrich's race is tied. Prez called Ging's opponent and told him we would gladly fund a recount (Name: Operation Gong-the-Ging).

Stole great new document for my book. It is a page from Sunu's appointment book:

7 A.M.: Yell at House Republicans.
7:15: Begin my own investigation into Israeli killings.
7:30: Devise new system of crop rotation and give it to those idiots at Agriculture.
7:45: Change locks on office doors of the brain-dead senators who didn't support budget deal.
8:00: Send aide to State to check color of Baker's tie.
9:00: Rewrite health legislation. Include my idea on cure for pneumonia.
9:30: Devise new highway system for US and Canada.
10:00: Show chef how to make a decent Peach Melba.

With all the press about Sunu overextending himself, I thought about leaking this, but why leak today what you can sell tomorrow?

*Nov. 13*: All the presh the Prez put on Shamir to take action against the officer in charge of the Pal. killings has had an effect. Shamir has promoted him. Prez: "If I wasn't so busy having it with Iraq, I'd be having it with Israel!"

*Nov. 19*: Tanks with the inverted guns being delivered to Saudi A. Media still suspicious so we'll have to use tanks in battle when it comes. But our soldiers shouldn't get hurt. Schwarzy called to say that the shells Chrysler sent don't work either. It pays to order everything from the same place.

*Nov. 30*: UN authorized the use of force against Iraq. Prez ecstatic. Spent the P.M. writing thank-you notes to everyone in the Security Council at the UN. I told Prez I'd mail them for him and I stole my best doc. yet:

*Mr. Pertti Paasio*
Foreign Minister
Helsinki, Finland

Dear Party-Boy,
Just wanted to thank you for your support on this resolution which allows force against the Hooser. As you know, I've really, really, really finally and for the last time had it with Iraq and I'd like to thank you for having had it with me! Come see us on Pennsylvania A. There's a horseshoe here with your name on it. Stay super.

GHWB, the P. □

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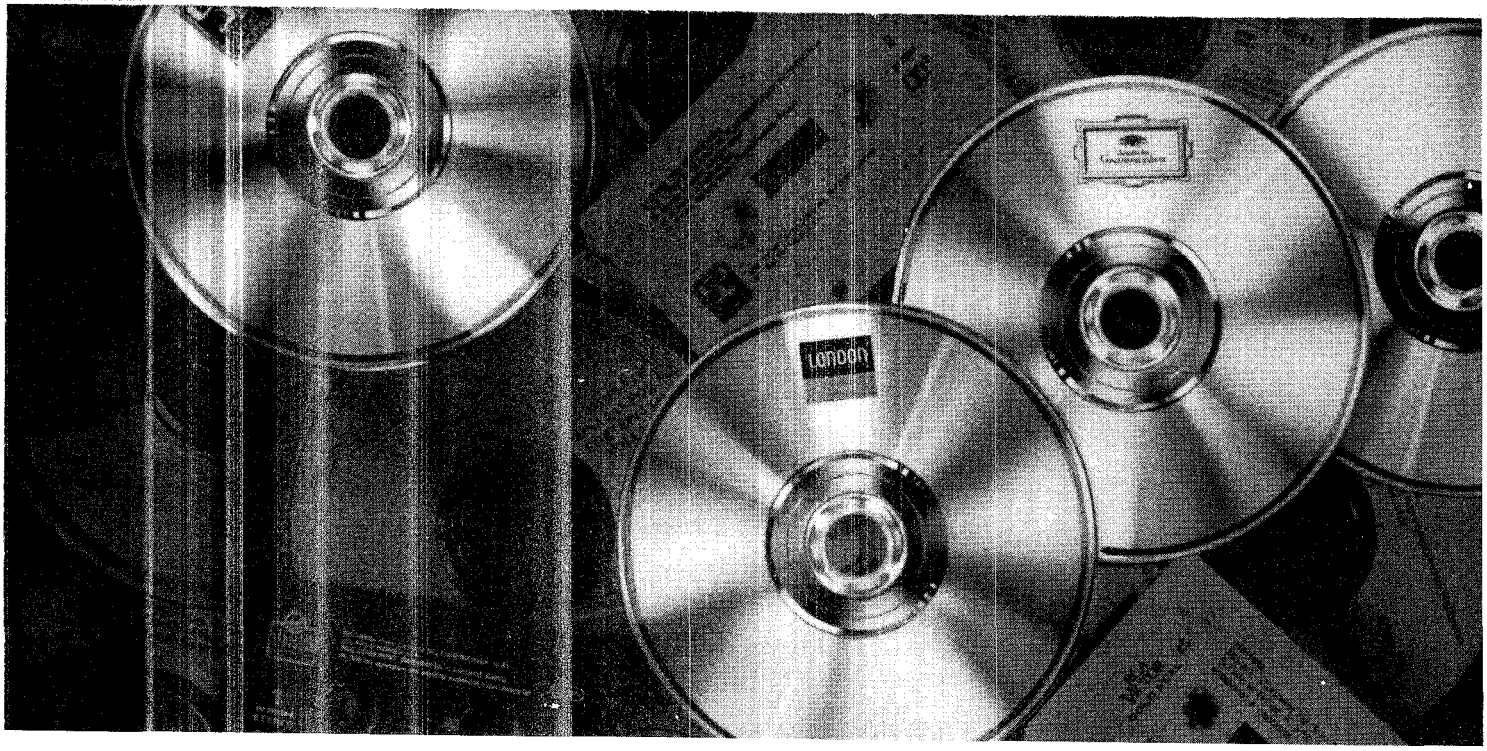



**Horowitz At Home** • Mozart, Schubert, more. DG **25211**

**Salerno-Sonnenberg: Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto; more** • NY Chamber Sym./Schwarz. Angel **34670**

**Karajan: Brahms, Symphony No. 1** • Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. "Impressive."—Billboard DG **35084**

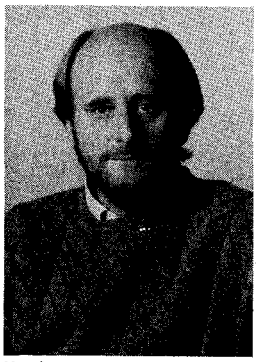
**Ravel, Piano Concertos; more** • Argerich & Béroff, pianos. Abbado cond. DG **15462**

**Levine: Mozart, Syms. Nos. 30, 31 ("Paris") & 32** Vienna Phil. DG **25341**

**Ton Koopman: Bach, Organ Works Vol. 1** • Toccata & Fugue, more. Novalis **01137**

**Bylsma: Boccherini, Cello Concertos** • Plus 2 Syms. Tafelmusik. DHM **83876**

**Corelli, Concerti Grossi Op. 6** Tafelmusik. "Best Of 1989"—N. Y. Times DHM **73751**



**Norrington: Beethoven, Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"); more** • Angel **70023**

**Sitkovetsky: Mozart, Violin Concertos Nos. 1-3** English Chamber Orch. Novalis **51430**

**Anthony Newman: Scarlatti, Sonatas** • Newport **64168**

**Perlman: French Violin Showpieces** • Havanaise, more. Mehta cond. DG **15457**

**Kocsis: Bartók, Piano Concerto No. 1** Philips **25126**

**Kronos Quartet: Black Angels** • Music of Ives, Tallis, more. Elektra **62287**

**Horowitz: The Studio Recordings** • Kreisleriana, more. A Grammy Award Winner! DG **25056**

**Van Cliburn: Liszt & Grieg Piano Concertos** • Phila./Ormandy. RCA **00606**

**Sound The Trumpet** • Purcell, others. With organ & percussion. Newport **00990**

**Galway Plays Beethoven** Lively Serenades plus Flute Sonata. RCA **34545**

**Copland, Appalachian Spring; more** • St. Louis/Slatkin. Angel **54176**

**Rattle: Stravinsky, The Firebird** • Plus 4 Etudes & Scherzo à la Russe. Angel **93834**

**Pops In Space** • Boston Pops Williams. Star Wars, more. Philips **05392**

**Mozart, Lodron Serenades** The Camerata Bern. Virtuosic and ingratiating. Novalis **63642**

**On The Boardwalk** • Paragon Orch. Chatterbox Rag, more. Newport **24699**

**Arrau: Beethoven, Piano Sonatas Nos. 21 ("Waldstein") & 30; more** Philips **15366**

**Dvořák, Symphony No. 9 ("From The New World")** Cleveland Orch./Dohnányi. London **15065**

**Those Fabulous Hollywood Marches** • Superman, more. Pro Arte **92487**

**Fauré, Requiem; more** • Te Kanawa, Milnes. Montreal Symphony led by Charles Dutoit. London **15321**

**Reiner: Rossini, Overtures** Chicago Symphony. Barber Of Seville, more. RCA **43972**

**Davis: Mahler, Sym. No. 1 ("The Titan")** • Bavarian Radio Sym. Novalis **73745**

**Accardo: Bach, Violin Concertos** • Chamber Orch. Of Europe Philips **25162**

**Victor Vocal Series: Lauritz Melchior** • With Flagstad & Lehmann. Mein Lieber Schwann, more. RCA **43508**

**Anthony Newman: Franck, Organ Works Vol. 1** • Piéce Heroïque, more. Newport **10590**

**Norrington: Beethoven, Syms. Nos. 1 & 6 ("Pastorale")** • Angel **60068**

**Price & Warfield: Gershwin, Porgy & Bess Highlights** Summertime, more. RCA **00994**

**Dvořák, Symphony No. 8; more** • Cleveland/Dohnányi. London **15042**

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**Bartók, Concerto For Orch.** Music For Strings, Percussion, & Celesta. Montreal/Dutoit, London **25303**

**Dvořák, Serenades** Camerata Bern. Novalis **63639**

**Heifetz: The Decca Masters, Vol. 1** • Humoreske, Clair de lune, more. MCA **00604**

**Ashkenazy: Rachmaninov, Piano Concerto No. 3** Concertgebouw Orch./Haitink. London **25157**

**Motion Picture Classics, Vol. 1** • Bos. Pops/Fiedler Ben-Hur, more. RCA **01057**

**Pavarotti At Carnegie Hall** Scarlatti, Schubert, more. London **15311**

**Previn: Beethoven, Symphony No. 7 in A Major; more** • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA **53621**

**Ashkenazy: Mozart, Piano Concertos Nos. 11 & 14** Philharmonia Orch. London **25424**

**Kronos Quartet: White Man Sleeps** • More by Bartók, Ives, Johnson, Hassell, etc. Nonesuch **40256**

**Nissman: Prokofiev, Piano Sons. V. 2** • Newport **83775**

**The Bulgarian Voices, Vol. 2** • Nonesuch **54525**

**Cliburn: My Favorite Chopin** "Heroic" Polonaise, "Minute" Waltz, "Winter Wind" Etude, more. RCA **10998**

**Galway: Greatest Hits** Memory, Greensleeves, Perhaps Love, more. RCA **73233**

**Ravel, Mother Goose; Le Tombeau de Couperin; Pavane; more** • Montreal Sym./Dutoit. London **25197**

**Ute Lemper Sings Kurt Weill** Mack The Knife, Speak Low, more. London **15163**

**Bychkov: Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5** • Berlin Philharmonic. Philips **15454**

**Emily Mitchell: Irish Harp Songs** • The Last Rose Of Summer, more. RCA **00812**

**Barry Douglas: Brahms, Piano Concerto No. 1** London Symphony. RCA **00732**

**Norrington: Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique** London Clas. Players. Angel **20760**

**Arrau: Beethoven, Piano Sonatas Nos. 3 & 8 ("Pathétique")** • Philips **15355**

**The Academy—By Request** Marriner conducts Sheep May Safely Graze, more. Angel **54094**

**O Cieco Mondo** • Ensemble Huelgas/Nevel. Italian Lauda from 1400. DHM **53753**

**Karajan: Brahms, Symphony No. 2** Berlin Phil. DG **25120**

**Fête à la Française** • Sorcerer's Apprentice, more. Dutoit cond. London **25235**

**Music Of Bali** • Gamelan & Kecak. Ritual Songs, more. Nonesuch **44671**

**Salerno-Sonnenberg: Franck, Violin Sonata, Brahms, Sonata; more.** Cecile Licad, piano. Angel **34674**

**Galway: The Enchanted Forest** • Melodies Of Japan. RCA **44533**

**Sitkovetsky: Mozart, Violin Concertos Nos. 4 & 5** • ECO. Novalis **63681**

**Norrington: Beethoven, Syms. Nos. 4 & 5** • London Clas. Players. Angel **60685**

**Victor Vocal Series: Kirsten Flagstad** • Music Of Wagner & others. Ho-jo-to-ho. Leibestod, more. RCA **63483**

**Dutoit: Stravinsky, Petrouchka; more** Montreal Symphony. London **15331**

**B. Nissman: Prokofiev, Piano Sonatas, Vol. 1** Newport **63709**

**Segovia: Ponce, Sonatas** "Riveting."—Fanfare MCA **64580**

**Kronos Quartet: Winter Was Hard** • Sallinen, Webern, etc. Nonesuch **00675**

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**Van Cliburn: Brahms, Piano Concerto No. 2** • Chicago/ Reiner. RCA **54268**

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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

*The pages that follow are a gift to our readers—advice and good cheer from our columnists. They'll tell you what they think you'll want to see and listen to during these holiday weeks (as well as what they've seen and listened to of late). They come to you with our greetings and a wish for peace.*

## FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

**Holiday Celluloid Wrap-Up**

What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Multiplex to be born? Scissors for hands, a six-chambered pistol for its heart, loins formed from Saharan sand and the ghosts of a thousand older, better pictures in its head—surely the Christmas movie is at hand.

And it's no revelation. Of the December releases I had seen by press time, even the most satisfying had *Part III* in the title. More on that later, along with Stephen Frears's *The Grifters*, which happens to be very good but is really a January release. (It popped up in December, for one week, apparently so it would qualify for Oscar nominations.) As for the rest:

*Edward Scissorhands*, directed by Tim Burton from a script by Caroline Thompson, might be considered a model for most of the other big pictures of the season. To its admirers, the film is a touching, funny, brilliantly realized fable. To the rest of us, it's all premise and no payoff. I can't fault the production team, which has created an immaculately bland, pastel, time-warped suburb. (The action takes place in 1960/1990.) Nor do I have anything but praise for the actors: Johnny Depp as the innocent android of the title, Dianne Wiest as the Avon saleslady who discovers him, Kathy Baker as a suburban *femme fatale* (who generates what plot there is), Winona Ryder as the teenage heartthrob. Such are the resources that Tim Burton squanders. In his eagerness to construct a trademarked, self-advertising fairy tale, he borrows snippets from *Frankenstein*, *Candide*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, old TV sitcoms and the new genre of the punk-rocker-in-suburbia. Had he dug into any of this material, *Edward Scissorhands* might have been memorable for something other than technical proficiency. But each element of the collage is paper-thin; instead of intruding onto each other, challenging and energizing themselves, the thematic cutouts are neatly overlaid. *Edward Scissorhands* ultimately resembles one of its hero's artistic creations: an accordion-fold of paper dolls, brightly colored, simple, featureless.

The cutout might be the symbol as well for Sydney Pollack's *Havana*, James Ivory's *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*, Woody Allen's *Alice*. To praise one above the other would merely be to express a preference for xerographic bond over onionskin.

*Havana* and *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge* are the most easily disposed of. The first is a transparent copy of *Casablanca*, set in Cuba 1958 instead of Morocco 1942. The second takes a pair of funny, nasty, Flaubertian novels by Evan S. Connell and turns them into *The Adventures of Lucy and Desi Bridge*.

*The Sheltering Sky* seems more substantial at first, since it at least has a theme: the attempt of wealthy American travelers to couple with the sexual-cultural Other. Unfortunately, Bernardo Bertolucci and his screenwriter, Mark Peloe, have treated Paul Bowles's novel with the sort of reverence that cries out for whoopee cushions. A churchlike hush settles on the film at the very start, when the author himself shows up to observe his characters and comment on them in a monotone voiceover. Strange, to get such assurances of high art in this film, whose ultimate distinction is to give new meaning to the term "dry hump." Debra Winger, one of the all-time experts at making movie love, adds a new item to her résumé, regaling John Malkovich on a high bluff overlooking the desert. She gasps and heaves and rolls her eyes; he bounces up and down a couple of times while talking about the Infinite. Viewers who are not left supine with laughter will admire Vittorio Storaro's photography.

By now, you might be wondering if there isn't *something* out there worth the price of a ticket. There is; but first, we have to discuss Woody Allen's *Alice*. It's the story of a wealthy, pixilated woman (Mia Farrow) who, ignored by her philandering husband, finds solace through all sorts of otherworldly events. Think of it as an *hommage* to Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*—as in, there was an *hommage* last night at the liquor store at 95th and Amsterdam. Police say the suspects will plead guilty to a lesser charge of aggravated esteem. If you must sit through the picture—which is somewhat brightened by Bernadette Peters, providing an all-too-brief moment of rude fun—you might remark the heroine's fantasy of entering a confessional booth, set outside on a lawn. That's the giveaway. Woody Allen, pretending to evoke the imaginative life of a Catholic—it's an act of chutzpah worthy of the savings and loan *hommage*.

Now for the good news: *The Godfather Part III* turns out to be as good as a post-sequel can be—which should not be taken as faint praise, when the year's big novel was *Rabbit at Rest*. The latest and apparently final installment in the Francis Ford Coppola–Mario Puzo saga is less gripping than the first *Godfather* and less interesting as a narrative structure than the second. Even so, it gives and keeps giving and doesn't give out until you're sated with the hero's doom. No doubt Updike's Harry Angstrom is a remarkable creation; but for my money, Michael Corleone is a bigger character in every way, perhaps the only one in contemporary American fiction who may truly be called tragic.

To stage Michael's last act, Coppola and Puzo have gone to new extremes, as the makers of a post-sequel must. But that doesn't mean they've multiplied the corpses. This *Godfather* is noticeably less bloody than either of its predecessors. It tops them, rather, by daring to bring Michael to unanticipated heights of power and prestige. He plays a role in one of the biggest international scandals of recent years; he also attempts to foil the ultimate mob hit. That's the public side of the drama, while on the private side Michael faces a reversal that's correspondingly huge.

Coppola directs these events with less bravura than in the past—if anything in the production says *sequel*, it's the loss of energy in the camerawork—but the performances more than take up the slack. Andy Garcia, a born star, is breathtaking as the up-and-coming Corleone nephew, Vincent; Eli Wallach plays the aged Don Altobello as if conducting

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himself in the role, with his forefinger as a baton; Sofia Coppola, with her almost prehensile lips, seems to chew her way through the part of Michael's daughter, Mary. As for Al Pacino, he may be beyond praise. Half a dozen images of him are competing for my attention even now—reaching down to dance with a little girl, staring at Vincent with exasperation and grudging approval, hunching over and stuffing a candy bar into his mouth to ward off a bout of insulin shock, holding a knife to his own throat to clinch an argument with his estranged wife. But the indelible image is the one at the end, when Michael, fulfilling the needs of tragedy, has lost everything. What happens then owes something to Edvard Munch and something to Brecht. But it's pure *Godfather* all the same; and considering Coppola's personal history, it's stunningly confessional as well. Go. See it.

*The Grifters*, which will soon return, is the latest of this past year's adaptations of novels by Jim Thompson, and to my mind the best by far. Set in the contemporary Southwest, it's full of racetracks, motels, leased-by-the-week offices and people who feel at home in them. It's a movie about the virtue of having low aspirations.

Roy (John Cusack) is a con artist who specializes in small-time cheating and won't try for anything more. You can see he knows his own limits—he keeps his money stashed behind a black velvet painting of a clown. Unfortunately, his girlfriend of the moment used to be a bigger operator. Myra (Annette Bening) looks to be about ten years older than Roy; judging from an early scene that shows her method of paying the landlord, she's considerably tougher, too. Eventually, Myra tells Roy that she wants him as a partner, which to him means only that she wants to grab his money and run.

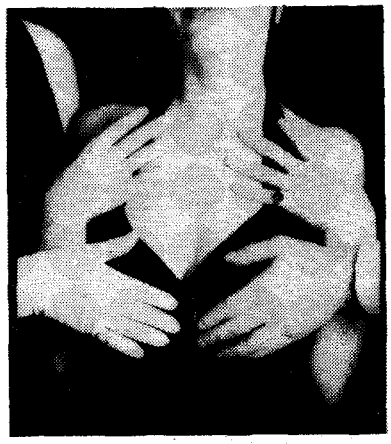
By this point, though, the third player has entered—Roy's mother, or in Myra's suspicions, his "mother." Lily (Anjelica Huston) works for a bookie, running a perfectly mechanical scam and living out of her car. Although she thinks Roy isn't strong enough for even the lowest level of grifting, she herself has gotten a little too ambitious. Her boss finds out; and what with protecting Roy, fighting off Myra and trying to save her own neck, she precipitates a climax that for sheer visceral excitement can stand up against most of the classic *films noirs*.

Much of the praise that's gone to *The Grifters* has settled on Anjelica Huston, who really is very good. As usual, she's mannered—I wish she'd lose that trick of snapping her head to the side—but then, the character is a creature of artifice, too. If the art of comedy got more respect, perhaps Huston would win an Oscar nomination for her role as the villain in last summer's *The Witches*. As it is, she'll probably be tapped for this role instead, and I can't complain. It's worth the price of admission, just to hear her make a thirty-second line reading out of the words "permanent damage." Credit should go as well to Cusack for his Roy—an amazing study in false bravado and empty amiability—and to Bening, whose Myra comes on like a kewpie doll with a dirty mind. Frears's direction is fast-paced and to the point; the screenplay, by Donald Westlake, is the work of a very cagey old pro.

I had heard ominous rumblings about *Awakenings*—"the *Rain Man* of 1990," said one friend, who didn't mean it as a compliment—and so the film struck me as a pleasant surprise. The story, based on a memoir by Oliver Sacks, concerns the experiences of a shy, nervous, clumsy, not-so-young doctor called Sayer (Robin Williams) who in 1969 stumbles into his first job dealing with "live patients." He goes to work in a ward for the chronically ill, where he discovers an entire class of patients written off as "living statues" who have similarities that nobody else has noticed. Can these people be helped? Dr. Sayer tries an experiment with Leonard Lowe (Robert De Niro), who has apparently been lost to the world for twenty years; and Lowe awakens.

That's the heart of the material; to get to it, you have to pass through a lot of tear-jerking and sermonizing by the director, Penny Marshall, and the writer, Steven Zaillian. They spare you no tearful reaction shot, no soundtrack crescendo, no thuddingly predictable tag line to a scene. Then, in case you've been able to abide all that, they conclude by turning *Awakenings* into the story of how Dr. Sayer finally asked somebody for a date. It's all as phony and manipulative as can be—and yet *Awakenings*, unlike any other film of the season, sent me out of the theater feeling that human beings were more complicated than I'd suspected, rather than less.

In other words, the movie didn't quite overwhelm Oliver Sacks's narrative. That's partly because the filmmakers, relying on their show-biz instincts, were unembarrassed about playing some of the

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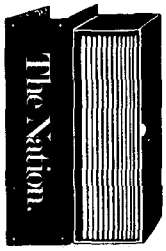


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material for laughs. Instead of the high-art reverence of *The Sheltering Sky* or the rather studied humor of *Alice*, the film starts out with gags. Some of Dr. Sayer's lines might have sounded natural in the mouth of Gracie Allen; when we see him at home, we discover that he lives a life of shtick. His refrigerator contains one quart of milk and several dozen plant specimens; his idea of decorating is to put up a chart of the periodic table of the elements. This sort of thing may be cheap, but it saves *Awakenings* from solemnity. As for the actors: Williams gives perhaps the best straight performance I've seen from him, De Niro is up to his own standards and the supporting cast is deep in talent. If you can put up with its conventions—a big "if," admittedly—I think you'll find *Awakenings* doesn't waste your time.

The easiest way to explain why I enjoyed *The Rookie* is to talk about Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*. Was it really that preposterous to cast Mel Gibson in the lead? Under the circumstances, yes—because Zeffirelli has surrounded him with an otherwise unexceptionable cast. But think how exciting it would have been had Zeffirelli gone all the way, with Gibson as Hamlet, Bernadette Peters as Gertrude and (the casting coup of the century) Clint Eastwood as Claudius.

Eastwood, seducing his brother's wife; Eastwood, murdering his way to the throne; Eastwood, stalking out of the play-within-the-play, with his jaw set and that vein in his temple throbbing—you'd see why Hamlet doesn't dare lift a finger. And imagine the scenes with Laertes—the sly winks, the bonhomie, the way Eastwood would have the younger man striving for his approval.

Change Claudius into an L.A.P.D. detective and Laertes into Charlie Sheen, and you've got *The Rookie*, Eastwood's latest vigilante, buddy-cop, car-wreck comedy. It's about as aesthetically sophisticated as a shot of whiskey, but also, I'm happy to say, as reliable. Played strictly for laughs, the movie provides a high number of casualties—people, cars, even a commercial jet—and a scene in which Eastwood once again enacts his most persistent screen fantasy, being tied up and sexually abused by a dark-haired woman. I suppose some people will be offended at the film's cheerful portrayal of police violence. Those are the same people who will be shocked, *shocked*, to learn that *Havana* tells you nothing about socioeconomics. □

# THEATER.

## THOMAS M. DISCH

**The Fever**
**The 52nd Street Project**
**Shogun**
**Fiddler on the Roof**
**Romeo and Juliet**
**Shadowlands**
**I Stand Before You Naked**

If it has ever puzzled you why an intelligent, cultivated, well-spoken and genial person might decide to vote for Jesse Helms, or condone the routine brutalities of death squads, or join the Klan, you will be fascinated, as I was, with Wallace Shawn's monologue *The Fever*, lately at the Public Theater but scheduled to tour to England in January and then boomerang back to such representative New York venues as Second Stage, LaMaMa and Lincoln Center—an itinerary so like a triumphal march that one might think the play were Gielgud's *Lear* or Streisand's *Hamlet*, something transcending criticism, a theatrical prodigy.

Child prodigy would be closer the mark, for Shawn, though bald and 47, has the physical stature, vocal timbre, emotional range and moral vision of a bright child of the upper classes, one who's been conditioned by a regimen of sugarplums and nannies to live in terror of the world beyond the nursery. That world, as Shawn describes it, is one of "bad" neighborhoods and rough kids who will all grow up to be muggers, terrorists and sans-culottes, against whom the only effective stabilizing force is state terror, with particular emphasis on physical torture. Only at those moments when Shawn asserts the practical necessity for using brute force does his usually elfin voice deepen to an unsteady baritone and a butch gravitas replace his gratingly ingratiating demeanor.

*The Fever* is in many ways a sonata version of his *Aunt Dan and Lemon* of 1985, with Shawn assuming the role of the diminutive Machiavelli then played by Linda Hunt and scrapping all the supporting roles so as better to focus on the one thing close to his heart: himself and his anguish in having to adopt horrific political positions by way of defending his unmerited privileges. Shawn is a rhapsodist of liberal guilt, though there is often a strain of overreaching in his most angst-laden passages—as when he reminisces of vomiting into the toilet bowl of a Third World hotel and encountering a large emblematic bug. Such moments smack of college workshop poetry readings: fraught, overwrought, unearned. Happily, they're rare. Most of the time, Shawn maintains the persona he established in *My Dinner With Andre*, Wally the falsely naïve *flâneur*, Menu B to the Menu A of Spalding Gray.

The argument of *The Fever* is a *reductio ad absurdum* of conventional "tough-mindedness": Property is theft, and the legitimate rage of have-nots would put an end to all good children's birthday parties unless an iron boot grinds the faces of the dispossessed into the dust forever. It takes Shawn most of 100 minutes to propound this thesis because he chooses to gear down his logical machinery to the slowest possible intellectual r.p.m., either because he supposes everyone in the audience to have fifth-grade verbal skills or because he supposes that such seeming simplicity gives his argument the force of axiomatic and unalterable law.

Somewhere at the monologue's halfway mark Shawn wriggles out of the sweater he's wearing over his turtleneck, and that's as physical as it gets. There's no set, no lighting changes, nothing but the man squirming in his chair. As a crowning absence, Shawn has decreed that there is not even to be a program for the show. This minimalism seems less an aesthetic decision than a marketing strategy: This is a show that can be played in any empty theater without hiring anyone but its author and soloist, a publicist and janitors. In a way, this dramaturgical penury is the objective correlative of the mean-spiritedness of Shawn's text. To be consistent he ought to insist that his audience all sit on the bare floor, so that he is the only person afforded the luxury of a chair.

All these meannesses could be credited as artistic integrity if *The Fever* were what its author intended, a courageous exploration of the liberal soul, ruthless and searing in its unremitting honesty. At the end of the show Shawn beats his breast (twice!), lowers his eyes and says, "Forgive me." Presumably, for having exposed so starkly the skeletons in his own, and his audience's, closets. In fact, Shawn is rather unforthcoming. The soul he bares is not his own but one as merely theoretical as Ralph Waldo Emerson's, pure intellect nattering in a social void. Even without program notes, most of his audience will know that Wally is the son

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of William Shawn, the longtime former editor of *The New Yorker*, and thus privy, for much of his life, to New York's ripest scuttlebutt. *The Fever* eschews not just name-dropping but simple candor. Wally Shawn will never suffer the fate of Truman Capote, exiled from the beau monde for his literary indiscretions.

The remedy for Shawn's purported agony is one that any minister, social worker and, indeed, most dramatists could prescribe in two words, if the art of the monologue allowed such an intrusion: Practical Charity. Take an interest in other people, in how they actually live (more things than their tortures happen to the poor) and think and speak. When, at intervals throughout *The Fever*, Shawn wants to convey what a basically decent and generous fellow he is, how life-affirming, etc., the evidence he offers is how he always strives to entertain his friends with his wit and charm; i.e., how, even off the stage, he insists on being the cynosure of all eyes.

For a vivid and theatrically delightful example of Practical Charity at work in the theater, Shawn would have had to go no further than The 52nd Street Project's production of *The Dream Theme*, an evening of genuinely ingratiating one-acters presented at the Ensemble Studio Theatre. Let me quote the program's statement of the project's aims:

> The 52nd Street Project is an independent nonprofit organization that operates with the cooperation of the Police Athletic League and the Ensemble Studio Theatre. The Project brings inner-city children together with professional theatre artists to create theatre. The Dream Theme production is a part of our Playmaking program that is designed to teach children how to write plays. After eight weeks of classes, each child is given two actors, a theme and a director who guides him or her through the writing of a play during a weekend in the country. These are the fruits of their labors.

A laudable undertaking—and the result is an exuberant evening of theater from which more playwrights than Wallace Shawn might learn lessons. Such as, that plays have their origin in play and playfulness; and that dramatic truth is more likely to emerge from dialogue and interaction than from the essentially tensionless form of an author anatomizing his own sore conscience. Ultimately, of course, no adult—not even a professional child impersonator like Pee-wee Herman—can compete with children at their visionary best, of whose performances Jesus gave the definitive review: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus (played by Paul S. Eckstein) appeared in a cameo role in one of the evening's most touching playlets, Elijah Barbosa's "All Good People Go to Heaven," in which an aged and world-weary woman (Lili Taylor) prays that her life come to an end, a prayer Jesus refuses to grant. When she demands, sorrowfully, "Why?" Jesus replies, like a firm but loving parent, "Because I say so." Jamar Williams, in "A Dream of Life (and How to Live It)," was also concerned, like playwrights Barbosa and Shawn, with matters of high moral consequence—in this case how to be rich in spirit—and so sound is Williams's advice that, were Shawn to take it to heart, his anguish would be much abated.

## *If ever a musical asked to be signed for the deaf, it's* Shogun.

Most of the other playlets in *The Dream Theme* are more lighthearted and comic in character. Samona Squire's "A Mean Dream" offers a mute devil (Paul Carlin) who communicates his temptations by trumpet; Wendell Borrero's "It's All a Dream" shows us sibling rivals Peter Francis James and Polly Adams metamorphosed into Jason and Freddy of horror-movie fame; and Willie Reale, the artistic director of The 52nd Street Project, directs Karen Evans-Kandel and Peter MacNicol in the comic high point of the evening, Richard Myrie's "The Realtor and the Ratking." There is also a minimusical, "Anna Falls in Love," by Yolanda Maldonado, who is the lyricist of two fine songs, "I Like Don" (music by Cecilia Arana) and "Mom and Me" (music by Henry Krieger). A whole lot of other people, kids and grown-ups, worked together to make *The Dream Theme* possible, and I thank them all for giving me my biggest zap of cheer this holiday season.

Though The 52nd Street Project is an ongoing concern, any one of their shows has a very limited run, so if you wish to catch their act or contribute to it, you can join their mailing list by writing: The 52nd Street Project, 552 West 52nd St., New York, NY 10019.

Of *Shogun, The Musical* I am reluctant to say any more than, "Oh dear." I'd enjoyed the TV miniseries hugely and thought it just the sort of larger-than-life story that could be tricked out as pop opera, in the style of *Phantom* or *Les Miz*. But on the stage of the enormous Marquis Theatre, James Clavell's plot tends to go out of focus, as do the singers' overamplified voices. Never for a moment did I think Philip Casnoff was an English sea captain of A.D. 1600, and after a few songs I didn't think he was a singer, either. As Lady Mariko, June Angela was beautiful, if often inscrutable, but she did sing on key. Alone of all the cast, Francis Ruivivar, in the *buffo* role of Lord Toranaga, delivered a performance in the garish, over-the-wall style of the physical production (sets by Loren Sherman; costumes by Patricia Zipprodt).

But the music, oh dear. It's a disaster on a par with the piece of scenery that fell on Philip Casnoff's head and delayed the show's opening night. The score is least dismaying where composer Paul Chihara has had to supply background music for martial arts pantomimes; where he has had to set John Driver's witless lyrics, it reaches the status of mortal sin. If ever a musical asked to be signed for the deaf, it's *Shogun*.

Of *Fiddler on the Roof* little more need be said than that it is as good as ever. The art of curatorship has rarely been exercised so scrupulously in the Broadway theater. The Chagallesque sets by Boris Aronson have been faithfully reproduced; ditto the Zipprodt costumes. The credits at the foot of the program are worth quoting in full for what they may portend for future revivals: "Original Production Directed & Choreographed by Jerome Robbins," followed in letters half that size by "Choreography Reproduced by Sammy Dallas Bayes/Direction Reproduced by Ruth Mitchell." The role of Tevye is reproduced by Topol, who, oddly, seems younger this time round than in the 1970 movie version, when he had to work at looking the age he's now achieved naturally. So, if you loved *Fiddler* in 1964, you can love it again just the same; and if you missed it then, here's your chance. Book (Joseph Stein), score (Jerry Bock) and lyrics (Sheldon Harnick) may never before have meshed with this kind of Rolls-Royce precision.

Has Time, then, played none of its usual ironic tricks on the text? Well, it does seem darker to me now, and the final curtain, with Tevye heading for

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the New World but leaving behind three daughters probably destined to be victims of the Holocaust, seems overtly tragic. In the movie version, by contrast, the final emphasis is that Tevye's glass is half-full rather than half-empty: America awaits him, in Technicolor. And if *Fiddler*'s a tragedy, then may it not be a tragic flaw in Tevye's character that he accedes to his daughters' determination to marry for love rather than prudentially? It's a question that makes the story a lot more interesting, though it must remain unanswerable. Everyone in the cast does a splendid job, but I won't recite the honor roll. I'll just give an unqualified recommendation. As of right now this is the best musical on Broadway.

Last year the Riverside Shakespeare Company was forced to leave its home of many years in the choir loft of a church on the Upper West Side, because its landlord thought it could get a much higher rent than R.S.C. could pay. In the Cinderella aftermath of that eviction, the church that got greedy has been unable to rent the space to anyone, after failing city inspections, while R.S.C. has moved to the comparatively princely new venue of Playhouse 91, at 316 East 91st Street, where the actors have room enough to duel and dance and the audience can be comfy in genuine padded theater seats, from which vantage they can enjoy the most dependably accomplished performances of Shakespeare's plays regularly available in New York City.

The latest of these, and perhaps a more severe test of a company's mettle than the "mature" tragedies, so called, is *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Charles Keating. R.S.C.'s main strength has generally been respect for the poetic text, or, practically speaking, a competence at delivering the Bard's blank verse so that the literal meaning, the drama and the verbal dazzle are communicated in the right proportions. This is something that the Public Theater's Shakespeare Marathon has been accomplishing no more than half the time; it was the main deficiency of the Roundabout's recent overproduced and overpraised *King Lear*; it is always the first casualty in high-concept *auteurist* productions like Mabou Mines's gender-reversed *Lear* and in star-heavy productions like the Glenda Jackson/Christopher Plummer *Macbeth*.

The best thing about Riverside Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is the nearly uniform competence of its cast of twenty-eight (only three roles are doubled). Even such minor figures as Lady Montague (played by Debra England) and Benvolio (John Plumpis) become vivid and *essential* presences. This Lady Montague is the kind of anxiously doting mother whose son will make just those amorous miscalculations we see him make, and this Benvolio, and even more Stephen Schnetzer's Mercutio, are necessary foils to the Romeo of Robert Sean Leonard—who is, no doubt about it, the star of the show, a Romeo at once definitive and very peculiar.

Leonard, who has had featured roles in such recent films as *Dead Poets Society* and *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, has a distinctive physical presence (so slight and boyish as to seem a couple of years younger than Gerit Quealy's Juliet); a vocalism and intelligence that allow him to deliver even Romeo's most ornamented conceits as though they issued from that moment's living impulse; and, rarest of all, a ring of truth across the whole emotional gamut, from bliss to despair. If only he had the dueling skills to give Tybalt what-for (he dispatches him summarily with a dagger, as might some common felon), Leonard's Romeo would be a nonpareil.

Gerit Quealy's Juliet is only adequate. Hers is a mature and glamorous Juliet, rather like Norma Shearer's, and all too often she *delivers* her lines. Perhaps I have been spoiled by the Juliets I've seen on the ballet stage, but Quealy just didn't seem to inhabit the role physically. Beth Fowler as the Nurse and Margot Dionne and Jeremy Johnson as Juliet's parents were first-rate, and Stephen Schnetzer went them one better by bringing a novel (to me) interpretation to the role of Mercutio, a Mercutio all in black, a sinister, swaggering bravo who is, for all his verbal polish, almost as nasty a customer as Tybalt. It puts an unusual spin on the first half of the play, but it's all there in the lines, at least as Schnetzer inflects and Keating directs them. Even with the reservations I've noted, this is a *Romeo and Juliet* worth making your own reservations for.

Finally, in the category of "Briefly Noted," I can commend William Nicholson's *Shadowlands* at the Brooks Atkinson and Joyce Carol Oates's *I Stand Before You Naked* at the American Place Theatre—but only to those content with half a dramatic loaf. *Shadowlands* is a theological problem play, after the manner of Graham Greene, concerning the strange romance of C.S. Lewis, the


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patron saint of genteel Episcopalianism, and an American divorcée, Joy Davidman, whose protracted death by cancer challenges Lewis's rather smug faith. Nigel Hawthorne as Lewis does a star turn; Jane Alexander, as Davidman, doesn't, though I suspect the fault is the author's.

The half-a-loaf aspect of Oates's play is that it isn't a play but an anthology of ten monologues, mostly adapted from her collection *The Assignation*. The shortest tend to be disposable, either trifles like "Wealthy Lady" (who alternates between writing checks to silly charities and brandishing a pistol as she imagines a killing spree) or portentous declamations about the agonies of love. But there are at least four monologues that I think will have a long life, if only as audition pieces. Two are comic (both played with a ditzy drollery by Marguerite Kuhn): "Wife of" concerns a retarded woman's "marriage" to a convicted serial killer; "Good Morning, Good Afternoon" is a quick lampoon of a mad receptionist. The two real show-stoppers are "The Orange," a clinical study of anorexia, performed affectingly by Bronwen Booth, and "Darling, I'm Telling You (Angel Eyes)," in which Annie McGreevey (to whom, Brava, bravissima!) plays a glass-caged stripper who gives a posthumous account of her murder at the hands of another serial killer. Oates's view of the war of the sexes seems not much different from that of Andrea Dworkin—all men are rapists and all sex is rape—with the significant difference that Oates's view of womankind is as unsparing as her view of men. Both sexes are crazed animals in the world's cruel zoo. One doesn't have to agree to find the world viewed in such a mirror interesting, even when the dramaturgy is as exigent as in *I Stand Before You Naked*. □

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# MUSIC.

## EDWARD W. SAID

### Opera Productions

Although he conducted only seven performances of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) at New York City's Metropolitan Opera this past fall, Carlos Kleiber nevertheless made a stunning impression. The opera is the best known and most palatable of Richard Strauss's works: Its Viennese setting, its charming waltzes, the bittersweet romance between an older woman and a young man and, above all, the unthreatening, chatty zest of its music and its Hofmannsthal libretto working together brilliantly have kept *Rosenkavalier* near the forefront of the Met's repertory. Yet it is difficult to overstate the extraordinary transformation in the score that was accomplished by Kleiber. Suffice it to say that it is depressingly rare to hear opera conducting of such intelligence and care. Scarcely a phrase in the rather long score came off routinely or passed by unnoticed; Strauss's sinuous lines were inflected and actually led, shaped and rendered without the slightest trace of exaggeration, forcing or fussiness. It was a very Haydnesque effect that Kleiber conveyed, if by Haydnesque we recall Charles Rosen's observation in *The Classical Style* that Haydn's style is one of amiability and conversational exchange. The sense given by Kleiber's work was that it addressed both score and listener, rather than attacking the one or parading itself before the other.

Would that the production showed such qualities. The lead singers—Felicity Lott as the Marschallin, Anne Sofie von Otter as Octavian, Aage Haugland as Ochs, Barbara Bonney as Sophie—ranged from excellent (Otter and Haugland) to good (Lott and Bonney), but there was little brilliance in performance or direction and hardly any emphasis on the combination of perversity and semi-official solemnity that characterized the products of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's long collaboration.

Some inkling of how problematic and unusually interesting that extraordinary partnership was is provided by Michael Steinberg in his recent book, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology, 1890-1938* (Cornell University Press). Steinberg makes the case with remarkable scholarship and analysis that summertime Salzburg (with Hoffmansthal as its spiritual father) was the scene of an attempt to reconstitute Austria as a European cultural center after it had been marginalized by the collapse of the Habsburg empire. This new image of Austria was to be at once nationalist and, in its attachment to ideals taken from the Catholic Baroque, universalist and conservative. The Salzburg Festival can therefore usefully be seen as paralleling Wagner's efforts at Bayreuth to turn music and opera to political and ideological purpose. In Salzburg it was the operas of Mozart and Strauss—worldly, consummately polished, engaging, allegorical and, as they came to be enshrined at the festival, culturally sanctioned—that were to serve a grandiose spiritual mission. Along with Hofmannsthal's *Everyman*, they are still performed annually in Salzburg, although for a period of almost thirty years the festival became the personal stage, as it were, of Herbert von Karajan.

What Kleiber captured in his reading of the score was the significance of Strauss's portrait of late-eighteenth-century Vienna, so often (as in the Met's production) left largely to exquisite posing and cute period comedy. Central to this highly stylized portrait is the waltz, whose antecedents, in the years before it was made famous by Johann Strauss (no relation to the thoroughly German Richard), included the minuets, German dances, ländler and waltzes composed for the aristocracy by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert. Steinberg suggests in an earlier essay that Strauss and Hofmannsthal used dance forms in *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Rosenkavalier* partly because Hofmannsthal believed that only dance could get at the instinctual life hidden beneath a surface of worldly manners, and partly because words were incapable of saying what the body's physical motions could. Kleiber's conducting underlined the prevalence of the waltz rhythms throughout the score, a prevalence not easily reduced to the mindless oom-pah-pah most conductors settle for; rather, the waltz rhythm was made to speak the inner language of what Steinberg calls a raw core of sexual striving.

But while the music came alive under Kleiber's guidance, the stage work seemed sodden and exhausted. Lott is a beautiful woman but doesn't have either the presence or voice to suggest a powerful 32-year-old aristocrat giving up a young

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lover (Octavian) and also effecting his marriage to the daughter of a rich bourgeois. The Marschallin is a character genuinely related in drive and vigor to Salome and Elektra, but without their remorseless and basically uninformed frenzy. She remains a perfectly mannered social being; when she expresses sorrow, anger or defiance they are conveyed by a minimum of means—a change in tone here, a gesture or a quickened rhythm there. In Act I, for example, Kleiber varied each recurrence of the underlying dance rhythms as if to register as precisely as possible the changing scene around the Marschallin as she dealt with the various interruptions in her blissful life with Octavian: the appearance of Baron Ochs, her numerous retainers, the dawning sense of some elaborate social transformation and so on. Never too assertive or insistent in the orchestra, these minimal gestures got only an occasional acknowledgment from Lott, who seemed to me trapped in a conventional image of the opera.

For all its period affectations *Rosenkavalier* is in fact a twentieth-century opera, not just a modern imitation of an eighteenth-century court spectacle or comedy of manners. Even later eighteenth-century works (such as the Mozart and Gluck operas) cannot today be given in "authentic performances" but in reconstitutions or reinterpretations of what, also by reinterpretation, is believed to be an eighteenth-century style. This is where the boldly iconoclastic productions of Götz Friedrich or Peter Sellars seem to have it over timid reiterations put forth year after year by the Met and other large establishment houses. Productions should emphasize, I believe, the connections between an operatic work and its immediate context, as well as the self-conscious endeavor of restoring an older work to a late-twentieth-century audience. Both of these approaches contain a good deal more "authenticity" than clumsy naturalistic approximations done with little self-awareness or intelligence.

In effect the Marschallin is connected not only to Salome and Elektra but also to the woman in Schönberg's *Erwartung* and even to Berg's *Lulu*. Moreover, an interesting case can be made for twentieth-century opera—nearly everything between, say, Wagner and Berio, Britten and Henze—as offering performers and audiences alike a complex experience of modernity quite unlike the experience offered by the major nineteenth-century Italian tradition, which sits so stubbornly at the heart of the Met's enterprise. By occasionally bringing in people like the regrettable Franco Zeffirelli to mount productions whose raison d'être is to abrogate or disguise connections between an opera and its contemporary setting, the Met makes opera a noisy and expensive spectacle, one that draws in the wealthy, the corporate sponsor and the rigidly conservative but that considerably alienates both young and culturally involved people. By also refusing to concede that audiences should understand the action of an opera minute by minute—translations and supertitles are forbidden—the Met further boxes in and eviscerates great works of music drama.

So dominant has this aesthetic become that even when smaller companies in New York try to stage eccentric or difficult work, the result is often disappointing. It was wonderful to have been able to see *From the House of the Dead* (Janacek's rarely performed last opera) at the City Opera this fall, so extraordinarily rich and unusual is this work based on a Dostoyevsky novel (one that Tolstoy considered his contemporary's greatest work). Yet to have seen it in so underdirected, poorly staged and indifferently planned a production was most disappointing. Rhoda Levine's earlier productions for City Opera, notably of Anthony Davis's *The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, were bold and original. For the Janacek, an odd work in that it takes place entirely in a Siberian prison yard and has no real leading characters, she delivered a glumly realistic set, a barely discernible hodgepodge of singers and no action at all—no blocking and only the most rudimentary highlighting. To make matters worse, her singers, although they sang capably enough, poured forth their lines in an almost completely indistinct English. Most of the time the audience could neither understand what was being sung nor see who was singing: This, I think, is an unacceptable price to pay for seeing a work as rich and interesting as Janacek's.

*From the House of the Dead* is constructed around the confessions of a group of convicts, one of whom, a political prisoner named Alexander Petrovich Goryanshikov, is brought in at the beginning and released at the end. A wounded eagle kept by the prisoners is also set free at the same time, though the opera's overall mood is an unrelieved sadness and desperation. At the center of the opera is an inventive play within a play, which is staged by the convicts for their relief and


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entertainment. Christopher Keene conducted this scene and much of what succeeded it in the opera with attention and intelligence, if not always with the dramatic flair necessary to carry across the minutely organized merits of Janacek's score from one segment to the other. Only Eugene Perry as Shishkov broke through the encumbrances put on him by the production; his monologue (also a sort of play within a play) about killing his wife is the longest and most sustained piece of the score, and was delivered with an insensate intensity and musical control quite gripping in their effect.

Janacek, however, is one of the few twentieth-century composers whose operatic *oeuvre* is just beginning to be known to a wide late-twentieth-century audience (Strauss is another). And as the work becomes better known in more carefully planned productions than City Opera has mounted for *House of the Dead*, there is a better chance that other, now neglected works from the twentieth-century repertory can be staged. Perhaps these works might even someday displace the massive mid-nineteenth-century emphasis at the Met, along with which has gone poorly directed and sung work of the sort that inhibits the company's artistic growth. Certainly the City Opera, with its recent Ravel, Schönberg and Janacek attempts, has made a start, but New York audiences are still confronted with innumerable *Bohèmes* and *Traviatas* for every *Jenufa* or *Erwartung*.

Few operas are rarer and more deserving of a major New York revival than Ferruccio Busoni's masterpiece *Doktor Faust*, left unfinished at the time of his death in 1924. Busoni is scarcely known today, except perhaps as the transcriber of some of Bach's organ and violin works, still played by many pianists. He was born in Trieste but spent most of his life in Germany, where he was also known as one of the greatest of piano virtuosos. A contemporary of Schönberg, Mahler and Debussy, Busoni was no less a musical revolutionary than they: He wrote a number of highly unusual operas, an immense amount of piano music and a very important treatise on "new music."

The essence of Busoni's style is its complexity and its eclecticism. Most of his major work is both atonal and lyrical, contrapuntal and yet brilliantly dramatic. He was an intellectual and a visionary, someone whose work tried to accomplish syntheses between various styles, world views and techniques. Paradoxically, he often conceived works either on the largest scale (his piano concerto lasts about ninety minutes and requires an enormous orchestra, as well as a male chorus) or on the smallest (many of his finest piano pieces, for instance, are only moments long). In any event Busoni places tremendous demands on performers and, because he seems to have no obvious place in the canon, on audiences.

This is no reason for not performing him, since his work has begun to be available here and there, with usually successful results. In 1986 London's English National Opera staged a production of *Doktor Faust*, and restaged it this year. I happened to be in London at the time of this season's fifth performance in early November. I attended it and was overwhelmed by the work's force, and by the E.N.O.'s perspicacity in engaging a first-class conductor, an excellent cast and an inspired, if occasionally too flamboyant, designer and producer (Stefano Lazaridis and David Pountney, respectively).

*Busoni employed a sort of micrologic of composition.*

Antony Beaumont, the conductor specially brought in for *Faust*, is no ordinary musician; he is an exceptionally fine scholar, the editor of Busoni's letters and the author of a monumental one-volume study, *Busoni the Composer* (Indiana University Press). In addition, Beaumont was the man who actually completed the score of *Faust*, about a decade ago (Schönberg characteristically refused Busoni's widow's request to conclude the work from her husband's sketches). Beaumont discusses his work on the score of *Faust* in a very interesting section of the E.N.O.'s program for the opera, which also includes studies on the Faust legend, on the possible analogies between Faust and Edward Teller (an interesting, if curiously ambiguous notion) and on the late Erich Heller's animadversions upon Mann, Busoni, Goethe and others. All in all Beaumont's appearance was, I thought, a great compliment to both E.N.O. and the work.

Like Janacek, Busoni worked from innumerable small sketches, employing a sort of micrologic of composition, out of which grew the powerfully shaped and designed whole. Unlike Janacek, however, Busoni was haunted (some would say burdened) by his learning and his admiration for Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. A formalist, a scholar and a synthesizer whose commonest gestures were inclusion, complication and incorporation—a lot of *Faust* is constructed like a vast montage—Busoni worked on the opera for almost thirty years and obviously came to identify with its protagonist. He saw the learned adventurer as a composite figure, part Leonardo, part Goethian superman and part Christian heretic; his opera is therefore made of different and often contradictory elements, a mixture of ritual, puppet play and melodrama.

The basic set designed for E.N.O. by Lazaridis is both flexible and highly imaginative: Faust's desk is at stage center, flanked on both sides by immense heaped-up rows of filing cabinets through which run gangplanks, pipes, levers and gauges. To the right and left the stage floor is raised and lowered at sharp angles; the ribbed-rubber slats permit diabolical exits and appearances that, allied with clever lighting effects, communicate not only the hermetic enclosure of an individual scholar (library and laboratory) but also the sense of a world-accumulating power, industry and history (in bureaucratic command center, factory, public archive).

Pountney's production has its quirks, notably the stress on a sort of homosexual partnership between Faust and Mephistopheles and, something only partially in Busoni as I read him, the strictly secular view that finally denies both God and Devil in the interests of a totally (relatively hopeful) human solution for history. (My feeling is that the opera actually communicates an abiding pessimism). Pountney builds on Busoni's own de-emphasis of Marguerite/Helen, who is dissolved and distributed rather lackadaisically by the composer into a series of shadowy female figures (the Duchess of Parma, Helen of Troy and so on). At the end of the opera Faust and the Duchess (plus, it is supposed, the Devil) give birth to a splendid young boy, who redeems Faust in this world from his otherwise sternly arid damnation in the next. Graham Clark as Mephistopheles dominated the proceedings; a Roy Scheider look-alike, he has the physique and the piercing, if not always refined, tenor to

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render a properly tempting yet macabre and ultimately routed figure. Alan Opie, who does what I have been told is a less successful Faust than Thomas Allen did in the 1986 version, is a fine singer with a fluent baritone. He simply gave out under the role's formidably rigorous duration. Together with the numerous members of the large cast, they gave on the whole a wonderfully agile and interesting ensemble performance of a kind seldom encountered in New York.

There is a commercially available Deutsche Grammophon recording of *Faust*, and it features Fischer-Dieskau in the title role. He dispatches the part's enormous complexities with hair-raising excitement and expression. It was also Fischer-Dieskau who sang the role the only time the opera was performed in New York, a Carnegie Hall concert version in 1964. So far as I have been able to discover, the only fully staged American performance occurred in (of all places) Reno, in 1974. I mention these things because the relative avoidance in New York of difficult but vitally interesting twentieth-century operas like *Doktor Faust* (the same can be said of operas by Henze, Hindemith, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten and others) has further diminished the conventional warhorses that are regularly available. Even though the E.N.O. is not a star-studded company (Opie is no Fischer-Dieskau), the challenge of having to work through and actually realize a contemporary ensemble opera has often meant excellent and challenging productions, carefully rehearsed and directed performances and an innovative use of usually young but eminently willing and gifted artists. It has also meant that the more common repertory items like *Pagliacci* and *Rigoletto* often (but not always) benefit from the same approach. The result is that opera is lifted onto a higher and, in the end, I believe, altogether more profitable (in all senses) level. The timid and self-defeating thesis followed in New York that opera companies should rely on opulent reproductions of a handful of standard favorites, occasional but skimpy efforts to put on unusual operas, overpayment of a few stars and, most of the time, acceptance as a fact of life that opera-going means trudging through months of nondescript evenings is a grotesque mistake. It is additionally compounded by refusing to allow supertitles or operas sung in English (an E.N.O. rule), and also by discouraging, if not actually preventing, a critical and civilized discourse about opera in the late twentieth century from emerging. We now get little more than a scorecard approach to music that is fostered by the minuscule space usually given to reviewers (Andrew Porter in *The New Yorker* being a brilliant exception).

It is worth noting, finally, that many orchestras, visiting or resident, as well as instrumentalists follow a roughly equivalent procedure for their New York appearances. The frequency of safe but grimly uninteresting performances and repertories is thus far too high for a great city like New York. □

# MUSIC.

## GENE SANTORO

### Robin Holcomb

Until now, pianist Robin Holcomb has been known for pastel-dominated compositions on albums like *todos santos* (sound aspects), which have featured small groups and the New York Composers Orchestra (co-founded by Holcomb with husband Wayne Horvitz). On *Robin Holcomb* (Elektra/Musician), she expands an aspect of her talent that she's occasionally hinted at, and sings pop-sounding songs.

The Georgia-born and California-raised Holcomb's voice, like her material, is deceptive. Apparently slight and relatively narrow in its emotional range, tinged with a folkie's mournfulness and vibrato and lilting with a country-style yodel, her singing is, in fact, a fine vehicle for her lyrics. What she writes—which can be as elliptical, spare and associative as Imagist poetry—becomes even more complex because of the spaces that open up between the words and her slyly supple but clearly limited vocals. She evokes, in her own and different way, the rich ironic legacy rock monotoners like Lou Reed have created out of similar disjunctions between their verbal violence and relative lack of interpretive affect.

Holcomb's music shuffles a deep grab bag of influences: The Band and nineteenth-century parlor tunes, lieder and Joni Mitchell, 1960s psychedelia and Thelonious Monk, church organs and organ trios and r&b ballads and mountain songs and trance music. In her hands, these elements, rather than insisting on ironic discontinuity, are interwoven as compositional lines. Each tune is meant to have a singular approach, and most do—although it sometimes seems as if Holcomb's desire for structural integrity has pulled her back from the edge. If *Robin Holcomb*'s arrangements were allowed to go further outside the way the heartfelt lyrics do, to dare to cut themselves on jagged sonic edges a bit more, the way the best tracks, like "Waltz," "Yr Mother Called Them Farmhouses" and "Hand Me Down All Stories" do, the album would be even more compelling, which is no small praise.

Ironic as it may be, Holcomb's musical search for integration underlines how fractionalized she thinks the world is becoming. Humankind and nature are at war, mostly because people seem bent on misunderstanding what surrounds them: "When you're blinded to/The moon and its rise/How can you know the planting times?/Streetlights tell lies," she sings in the haunting "Deliver Me," the album's final track. And Holcomb is not alone: That sense of distance, the feeling that the planet and its cultures have exploded into a shifting set of increasingly disparate but potentially endlessly recombinant fragments, is one of the major things shared by the so-called downtown New York school—John Zorn, Tim Berne, Bill Frisell, Bobby Previte, Horvitz, Holcomb, et al. How they fit which pieces together determines, in large part, how they create their individual voices.

This aesthetic is neither as cold-blooded nor as synthetic as my description may make it seem. Nor, despite its shared theoretical origins, are its results necessarily related. Zorn furiously jump-cuts soundbites with Dadaist aggressiveness and an eye toward TV attention spans. Berne slamdunks postpunk noise, soul-music alto and Ornette Coleman into an urban hipster argot. Frisell bleeds post-apocalypse metalloid raunch into a keening pedal-steel longing for a big sky.

What Holcomb is proposing—and this is, in part, her American romantic side that harks back to the likes of Whitman and Ives—is the possibility of continuity and re-integration, despite the centripetal forces spinning lives and cultures into exploded shards—an information barrage with no sure focus, no set structures, no real or necessary meaning or understanding. Her work seems to delve beneath the barrage, where lurk overlooked and isolated pockets of history and cul-

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ture, and individuals whose quotidian tales and values can and should force us to reconsider our own. But she avoids the roseate idealism of Emersonian perspective. Any whiff of nostalgia, that frequent and dangerous companion to romanticism, about her project's orientation is dissipated by her clear-eyed insistence on the gritty and often violent American reality shaping the subcultures whose stories she unfolds.

That insistence is one reason she left college for a time in the 1970s to sharecrop in North Carolina; a decade later, she transformed that piece of personal history into the mythic theatrical song-cycle *Angels at the Four Corners*, which was performed at last year's New Music America. It's also why she writes in "Nine Lives," the opening cut of *Robin Holcomb*, "Do again what you always did/As a kid/Remind me of the secrets/That we always hid/Try to bargain with the angels/Try to bargain with your friends/What will you remember most/In the end?" According to Holcomb, what you should remember most are the hidden stories, the glorious and horrifying and touching and evanescent moments from which lives and cultures accumulate.

So it's no surprise to find that the album's key thematic cut is titled "Hand Me Down All Stories." Delightfully off-balance musically—Frisell's snaky and unpredictable guitar and Horvitz's chameleonic synthesizers successfully cloak its cantilevered movements in ear-warming psychedelia—the lyrics offer an alternative to cultural disintegration: a refocus on matrilineal history, or at least the reinvestment of cultural memory in women as well as men. In this reading, Western history—the heritage of the Christian timeline driving inevitably toward eternity with its patriarchal need to unify and dominate its narrative's meaning—should be replaced with the cyclical ebb and flow of nature that reconciles oppositions without obliterating differences. Obviously this is hardly a new idea; its fashionability is itself cyclical. But it's certainly an appropriate counterpoint for the Reagan/Bush era, which reinstated a simple-minded notion of phallocentric Progress with a vengeance.

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In "Hand Me Down All Stories" Holcomb sings, "O there was a time, the story goes/When all creation shone the same/If divide, divide is your desire/You'll darken every promise made . . . /Weave stories from the headlines/Into your lullabies tonight . . . /It takes a fool to foul the water wheel/And another fool to bring him down/There'll be dancing, dancing in the streets/If memory ever finds this town/O, hand me down all stories/Sweet, bitter truths to live by/May their pleasures be repeated/Throughout our little lives." The music entwines snatches of schoolyard melodies and rocking chug-a-lug beats as if that were the most natural thing in the world. At the song's end, the overdubbed voice of a child "sings & tells stories," as the credits put it. The child is Nica, daughter of Holcomb and Horvitz, named (via Monk's tune "Pannonica") after the famed patron of jazzers Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter, who helped support Monk until his death. Nica's presence demonstrates the generational links that preserve tales told and retold by families as they gather around holiday tables, stories that accrete cultural history.

The weekend before Thanksgiving, Holcomb sat at a grand piano at St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn Heights, as part of the fascinating Arts at St. Ann's series that continues through June. (For further series information, call 718-858-2424.) She was backed by her crackerjack band—Frisell, Horvitz, multireedman Doug Wieselman, bassist/tuba player Dave Hofstra and drummer Danny Frankel—and framed by the now restored, floor-to-ceiling stained-glass window (the first pictorial stained glass made in this country) depicting Christ's glorification in Heaven.

Onstage, Holcomb's arrangements got scrappier than on the more neatly mixed album, and the feisty band plunged in with gleeful vengeance. Wieselman's clarinet tilted the "Blue Monk"-spined "this poem is in memory of!" with scrabbly lunges; Frisell's guitar howled during the raging midsection of "Waltz"; Horvitz's synths rumbled and rheumed and flashed dissonant edges throughout; and Hofstra and Frankel made the off-balance, change-up rhythms they churned seem deceptively straightforward. That delicate balance of control and abandon is at the heart of Holcomb's art. It bodes well that she and her collaborators don't treat it like replicable clockwork. □


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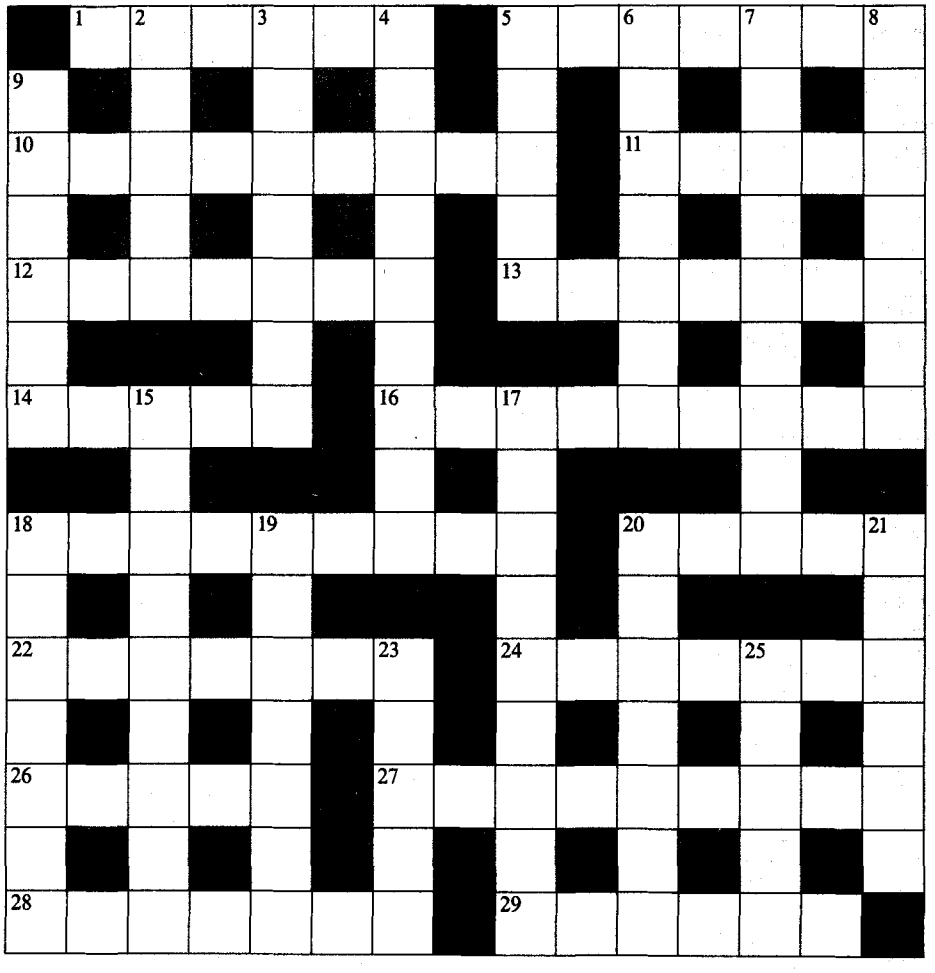
# Crossword Puzzle No. 2319

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 A public relations buzz-word such as "Buy"? (One expresses some relationship of place, time, manner etc.) (6)
5 Hailstorm—however, somewhat fishy! (7)
10 Does every body have such an inner tube? (Go up, as she appears.) (9)
11 A name for a woman, or man, possibly. (5)
12 What they used to call Utah was just a point in the desert! (7)
13 Bad salesmen forget the first point, but they cover things up rather well. (7)
14 Does one of these boats suggest a southern address? (5)
16 Omits what might be the first sign of burgeoning life in some plants. (6,3)
18 and 20 Starts to carry things to catch what might bear bars—or even stars. (8,6)
22 Where some of those film creatures were found—so no gal is put out! (Crips and Bloods?) (7)
24 Put something out again with old foreign money to bring a case to court. (7)
26 Forms a tightening circle, but is soon coming back to the Orient. (5)
27 One on the road doesn't necessarily lead to the nervous type. (9)
28 Use air a bit differently! It has quite a large mass! (7)
29 Sounds like what some campers drive—rarely appreciated by others. (6)

DOWN

2 Physicians have inside work, but how many of these might be prescribed? (5)
3 Thor, confused by sex, gives cautionary advice. (7)
4 One way to capture the game near her in Paris—at least a trifle of the game! (9)
5 Supposedly responsible for waste product. (5)
6 Something discriminating people may draw with years of "family"? (7)
7 In Spain, crab alone can make it. (9)
8 City dwellers may like it to be rapid—having two points in character. (7)
9 and 18 Caused by that little attachment they add to their arms in some suspense films, though one seldom gets it in the talkies. (6,7)
15 Rode like the villain? (5-4)
17 See 25
18 See 9
19 One has her pride, naturally! (7)
20 Made by one a few 2 down—being something supposedly amazing to the French. (7)
21 Is Laurence, for example, behind one point? (6)
23 Explaining why a certain Israeli might be occasionally prickly with Arabs so disguised? (5)
25 and 17 Scenes of comic relief in horror movies? (One doesn't get much of a jolt with them.) (5,9)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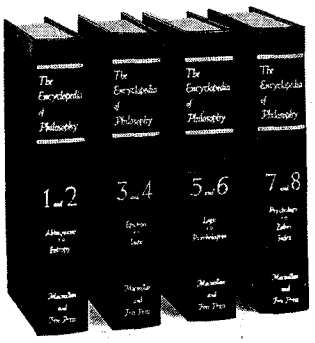


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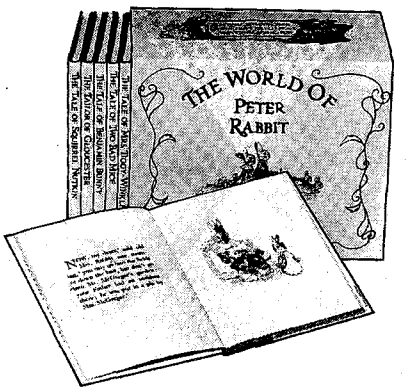


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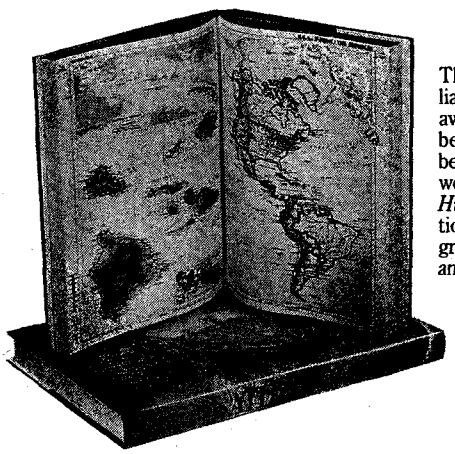

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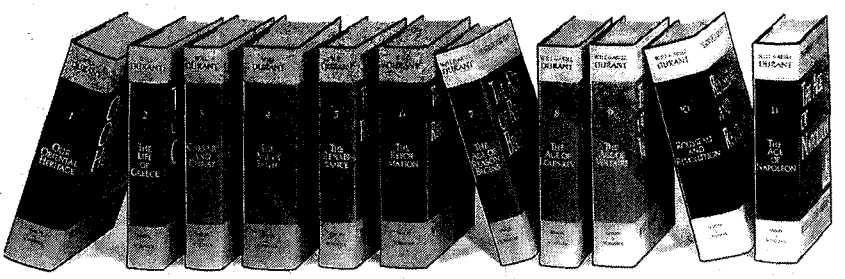

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